

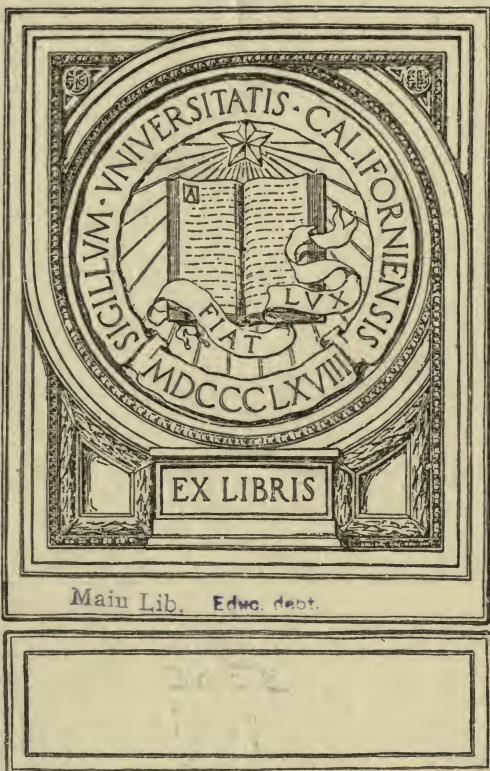
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A PATH  
TO FREEDOM  
IN THE SCHOOL

NORMAN MAC MUNN



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Ch I to top of page 18

Ch II



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**A PATH TO FREEDOM IN  
THE SCHOOL**

DIFFERENTIAL PARTNERSHIP  
METHOD OF  
FRENCH CONVERSATION

BY

NORMAN MAC MUNN, B.A. (OXON.)

Assistant Master at King Edward VI. School,  
Stratford-on-Avon.

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# A PATH TO FREEDOM IN THE SCHOOL

BY  
NORMAN MAC MUNN, B.A.

ASSISTANT MASTER AT KING EDWARD VI. SCHOOL,  
STRATFORD-ON-AVON.

Author of "The Mac Munn Differentialism: A New Method of  
Class Self-Teaching," etc.



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# TO THE BOYS

OF

KING EDWARD VI. SCHOOL,

STRATFORD-ON-AVON, TRUE PIONEERS,

WHO HAVE FROM THE FIRST HELPED HIM WITH

WONDERFUL ZEAL, TRUE SYMPATHY, AND AN ALMOST

RELIGIOUS FAITH IN THE DEEPER VALUE OF THEIR NEW

FREEDOM, THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY AND

GRATEFULLY, AND IN TOKEN OF FARE-

WELL, DEDICATED BY THEIR

FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR

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## PREFACE

BENEATH the seeming peacefulness—some would say the stagnation—of the English school there are signs of coming change. New and vitalizing forces are rising into action—and it is only the confirmed traditionalist who will believe that he is only watching the ordinary course of progressive development in education.

As the doctrines of Rousseau were to the social revolution of yesterday, so, it seems to many of us, the doctrines of Montessori will be to the educational revolution of to-morrow. But just as the message of Rousseau was reinforced by the words and actions of other leaders of intellectual revolt, so we, our minds ripe for change, are finding other sources of inspiration in collateral movements for the emancipation of the young.

Of these none is more wonderful and more inspiring than the Little Commonwealth for young delinquents directed by Mr. Homer Lane, on the lines of the George Junior Republics in America (except, perhaps, that it carries the principles of liberty to even greater lengths). Surely every logical and progressive teacher should be tempted by such victories of the

principle of liberty to remark: "Either these young criminals are better than my boys, or my boys are not quite so incapable of self-direction as I have been taught to believe."

Nevertheless the New School is very near—much nearer, I am convinced, than many people suppose—to being an accomplished fact. On both sides of the Atlantic there are soon to be experimental commonwealths for non-criminal boys. There is no need to dwell upon the significance of this first serious attempt to accord to boys the right to establish and to maintain the principles of their own discipline, and to leave in their hands much of the ordering of their own intellectual lives. It is to prove that the theory of this bold venture is in agreement with the newest truths of child psychology that I have written the first half of my book; and it is to the school commonwealth school that I return in the last few pages. The intervening portion of the volume deals with a system of teaching in partnership for which I venture to claim that, through the activity which it evokes in the class, it makes the problem of self-government much easier to solve than it would be if no such simple and ready-made device could be found.

I shall not here anticipate my arguments, but will leave the reader to judge whether or not I have made out my case for class-partnerships as the readiest solution for the problem of individualizing school-teaching. If I have done



that, I have accomplished nine-tenths of the work of proving that self-government is to be the basis of education in the future.

I cannot refrain from expressing my deep gratitude to sympathizers among the leaders (explicit or implicit) of what we may very well call the movement for the emancipation of the child—to Mr. Edmond Holmes, to Professor Culverwell, to Professor John Adams, to Mr. Thiselton Mark, to Mr. G. W. S. Howson—to many members of the Montessori Committee. Without this encouragement to carry me through days rendered dark by scepticism and even by hostility, I might very well have given up my work in despair—although I did indeed have the constant sympathy and devoted zeal of my boys, to whom I dedicate this book.

NORMAN MAC MUNN.



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## PART I

### THE THEORY OF CHILD EMANCIPATION



## CHAPTER I

### WORK AS PLAY THE BASIS OF FREEDOM

THE New English Dictionary defines work as "Expenditure of energy, striving, application of effort to some purpose." It will be seen at once that this definition is exclusive of no game ever devised—that any amusement in fact which did not satisfy it would not be a game.

But in a far deeper sense is it true that all young animals are working when they are playing. The play of a kitten is the purest auto-education. In chasing rapidly-moving objects across a room it is teaching itself to catch mice and birds, and probably teaching itself in quite the quickest available way. Each animal spends its period of immaturity in fitting itself for the struggle for existence—but always through movements that would seem purposeless did we not know the mature type which it will eventually embody. Similarly the human being from earliest babyhood is learning to adapt himself, firstly to his purely animal needs, secondly to a savage environment, and thirdly to the claims of a complex and highly socialized world. But as nature's slow but wonderfully sure processes are infinitely

less recognizable in man than in the lower animals, the issue has in his particular case been much longer obscured—the more so owing to the fact that theological and other preconceptions have helped towards its clouding. Further there is the same regular progression towards a higher stage of evolution. What I hope to show in this volume is that what is true of auto-education with regard to the simpler processes is true of it also with regard to the highest functions of the mind.

If the reasoning power of man has helped to an inestimable extent in providing the material for human education, it has also proved a hindrance where methods of application had to be devised. Indeed the root principles of universal education lying in the idea of imposing a system of adult manufacture on the child may be regarded as a singular instance of misapplied logic. The syllogism might be stated thus :

I know everything better than the child :

The child's nature is something :

Therefore I know more about the child's nature than the child himself.

And unfortunately thousands of years have passed without our doubting at all generally whether knowledge of the child's own mind was not the one exception "proving the rule" of our relative omniscience. That we could theorize about the immature mind better than the immature mind could theorize about itself is, of



course, perfectly obvious. But self-knowledge, which respects a thousand complex instincts and tendencies in addition to the mechanism of purely intellectual process, is a peculiarly elusive as well as a strangely conclusive thing. In a very profound sense a two-year-old baby knows more about the secrets of its own development than we could find out after ages of research. And we are beginning to see that in the first year or two of life there is hardly a wasted movement—hardly a movement, no matter how seemingly capricious, that does not play some part in the child's progress towards a higher stage of individual evolution.

Now if that is true of the baby, why not of the older child? Until a few years ago it would have been difficult to answer such a question with any confidence, because children had never been seen growing according to the laws of their own nature. Therefore one had either frankly to admit one's ignorance, or else to juggle with a psychology largely based upon the merest assumptions. Until Dr. Montessori's experiments one knew as little about the self-educating tendencies of the six-year-old child as about those of a mongoose or a guinea-pig. The veil has now been lifted, and it is apparent that there is precisely the same strong tendency in the older as in the younger infant to work out its own destinies in its own way, and to be continually seeking means to self-development. What is

infinitely more important is that it easily learns to prefer an ordered to a capricious progress towards the perfecting of its own type.

Nothing is more fortunate than that Dr. Montessori began her experiments with feeble-minded children, and that she was able presently to show not only that even a defective is capable of extraordinary mental expansion when allowed to learn in his own way, but that he can even become the mental equal (as judged, of course, by purely scholastic tests) of those normal children whose energies have been directed from without. The lesson of this raising of a number of mentally inferior children to the level of those hitherto so far above them could not fail to carry some conviction even to the most unimaginative. But the later developments of the Montessori system, if less "sensational," are far more fascinating to the educator, because they prove so absolutely (*a*) the purposive nature of childish play; (*b*) that the play tendency, as compared with adult conceptions of amusement, is of great elasticity and can be directed into channels of real profit in the social and intellectual development of the child; and (*c*) that no external stimulus is required to induce a child to discover the joy of overcoming the most varied difficulties. In short, Dr. Montessori's experiments made it abundantly clear that a perfectly unspoiled child loved play not for its own sake, but for the joy of overcoming

some new difficulty. He seemed rather to love play because it was work, than work because it was play.

Now it would be utterly impossible to exaggerate the significance of this lesson. In practice it means that the schoolmaster has spent thousands of years in teaching children to loaf when they wanted to work. All they asked for was work in activity. The schoolmaster replied : " You must work in passivity or not at all. What you call work in activity I call play. And as I know everything it *is* play. And if you play you shall be punished." The strong, healthy children, rich in the work-instinct, full of strength and the will to create, saw no way to breaking the laws of their own being, and they refused. But others with a genius for nothing but servitude, bowed their necks to the yoke and accepted the terms—and lived happy ever after. Of the irreconcilables, some wrote great books, and many died in our prisons and workhouses.

Go—at all monetary and other cost—to a Montessori school and watch. In five minutes, if you have the gift of watching well, you will have seen a miracle. You will see a little child draw a beautiful letter and rub it out many, many times to make it still more beautiful. Later on you will see a concentration such as you have never seen in infancy before ; you will see new and wonderful types of children, sweet-

voiced, gentle, graceful, full of a passion for order. You will come away either praying for the future or swearing at the past—but you cannot come away with unchanged ideas, because you have seen the vision of a brand new world.

But if Montessori is the first to push conclusions so far, she is not the first to have profited by the fact that work and play for a child are interchangeable terms. Who can forget the wonders wrought by “Egeria” in her village school in Sussex—so eloquently described by Mr. Edmond Holmes in *What Is and What Might Be?* And, to go back further, Comenius and Ratichius and Wolke and Pestalozzi and Froebel light up three centuries of sombre educational history with the flashes of prophetic genius. It is simply that Montessori was at once deep in an almost new science as well as rich in courage—hence she can state a universal truth after which others have been merely groping.

The great secret that has at last been applied completely in practice is that of Emerson when he wrote: “The secret of education lies in respecting the child.” Montessori did respect him, respected him humanly, respected him, above all, scientifically. She watched every movement and tried to explain it, and, having found to what it was tending, encouraged it and taught the child to quicken its development. She found that nothing was meaningless.

I can see no value in the comparison of Mon-



tessorism with the conceptions underlying the kindergarten system. The kindergartener is still High Priestess in her class, however gentle she may be. The Montessori Directress is self-effacement itself. She praises but little and she never criticizes. Her advice is never imposed, and her inspirations are the reflex of the inspirations she has received from her children. There is no time by which a child *should* have learned to button its clothes or write "cat"—she sits patiently and watches for the moment when these things shall come to pass. She shows the way, but she neither drags, nor carries, nor pushes the child along it—because she knows that the acceleration, while testing her own powers, would do nothing to develop those of her little charge. And she learns that the natural child, far from liking to be helped, will struggle with infinite patience to reach a self-proposed goal.

I am well aware that I am rendering myself liable to the charge of too easily accepting the claims made for a new and revolutionary system. What about those who are incredulous about the results of these experiments? I am sorry to be unaccommodating on this point, but I cannot refrain from saying that I know no single person *who has penetrated to the depths of a method based on very deep principles* who expresses the same incredulity as was implied in his first and hasty judgments. Unfortunately both admirers and censors are too often people who praise or condemn

Montessorism without ever having taken serious trouble to master either its theory or its practice. There are people who, without having read either Dr. Montessori's own book, or even the *résumés* of other writers, consider themselves quite entitled to pass judgment on this new psychology of childhood, while ignorant of its first essentials. One can only implore such critics to master a little better that which they are criticizing—and venture, so far as politeness admits of it, to consider their opinions as of negligible value.

When I first made acquaintance with the Montessori school through the remarkable report of Mr. Edmond Holmes, issued as a pamphlet by the Board of Education, I felt at once that not only had this way of teaching been fully justified, but that there were *a priori* grounds why it should be so. That fact does not, however, prevent my realizing that the *a priori* deductions of the average citizen would tend in a precisely opposite direction. To countless thousands Montessorism must appear as an extraordinary, almost fantastic paradox. Very few people appear to have a fair conception of true liberty—not realizing to what a remarkable extent they are prisoners within their own houses, and, what is worse, prisoners who have learned, like some of the victims of the Bastille, to see their only happiness within their prison walls. To these, moulded to the idea of repression and incapable of imagining that they would not



have become either clowns or rascals had their activities not been checked in childhood—to these the idea of a free and happy childhood suggests little more than licence grafted on to the conditions of their own education. But here they are making a very profound mistake. They have to remember that they have never seen a perfectly free child, for the completely satisfactory reason that until the coming of the Montessori school no such child had existed. *And there is no analogy whatever between the effects of partial and of complete freedom.*

It is to be remembered that liberty in the Montessori sense means liberty in a limited and controlled environment—so that all arguments from the effects of mere general indulgence are quite beside the point. In reality general indulgence has no tendency towards true freedom, inasmuch as it exposes its recipient to the hundred cramping influences—sometimes good, sometimes bad—of a complicated and highly artificial society. A person who was even inconceivably “free” in his relations with the world in general would be hopelessly fettered on every side. Montessori’s children mark the nearest approach to actual living freedom that has ever been attained, because the environment is so arranged that the natural activities of the young are provided for as they are provided for nowhere else. A child who seemed to “do what it liked” in a street would, for example, still be tied, because it would

be the victim of servile imitation of older people, or have its movements controlled by the presence of a large grown-up audience. In a Montessori school alone the child can be quite itself.

The effects of true liberty on childhood had thus been, till a very few years ago, a matter of the merest surmise—although no impartial spectator of the work of the George Junior Republics for young criminals could have failed to gain very valuable inspiration from the fact that the apparently hopeless “loafer” learned to work and to form ideals in an atmosphere of freedom, when every measure of repression had failed even to induce him to lead a passably innocent life. If it is remarkable that relatively few drew the full lesson of these particular miracles of moral reclamation, we have to remember in the first place that until a similar and highly successful colony was established in this country the American results were probably held to lack full statistical confirmation, and in the second place that such victories over bad moral tendencies are apt to be attributed to the influence of uniquely gifted individuals. But now that the same triumphs are reported from the new colony in Dorsetshire, these doubts cannot much longer prevail, and it will soon have to be admitted that the Montessori school and the criminal commonwealth, while differing so widely in the scope and the purpose of their work, are collateral proofs of the power of Nature to restore

both the moral and the intellectual balance of the individual once her restorative power has been allowed full play. Here, as elsewhere, of course, we have a special environment, but it is in this case an environment arranged by the average sentiment of a self-governing community—a sentiment which is healthy, (a) because different sorts of evil tendency are mutually destructive, and (b) because responsibility in freedom has a singular power of evoking the ambition to be worthy of the trust reposed in those to whom it has been accorded. But however we are to explain the psychology underlying this restoration of the “black sheep” among children to normal society, there appears to be no doubt about the fact that such transformations are frequent enough to be counted upon as a matter of course. One point, however, demands a special emphasis. Liberty without true activity—and that means for a child an adjustment of individual and collective activity—is a sheer impossibility. To ask a child to concentrate its mind on lessons learned under conditions of silence and inertia is to ask more from it than it is, in general, in its power to give. That is why punishments and rewards play so large a *rôle* in the administration of a school conducted on traditional lines—because we are inviting the child to contradict the first law of its own nature.

Anything more preposterous than this habit of



expecting a child to sit for long hours a day and listen attentively to the lessons of his master or to the questioning of his fellow-pupils does not exist. We ask a boy to be inert in precisely inverse proportion to his own inner activity. We should be sorry, as adults, even when we have learned to concentrate our minds on the most tedious of subjects, to go through the performance we count on so absolutely from human beings at the most restless period of their existence. Sometimes, indeed, we get a satisfactory response, but at what a cost in the sacrifice of almost every natural and healthy instinct one shudders to contemplate.

So grotesque, indeed, has this inert school seemed to certain critics who are also parents, that I have heard it questioned—and with scientific arguments in support of the thesis—that children would be better out of school altogether until they have reached the age of twelve. While I do not, of course, accept this quite impracticable suggestion, it seems to me that it does by its very exaggeration point to glaring defects in our existing system. It means that there are scientifically minded parents who believe that while school instruction is of the highest importance, it may be bought at far too high a price.

Whatever is to be the detail of the remedy, I fancy we are on the point of realizing its general nature. It will be the remedy of work in play—

the only kind of work that nature respects or encourages in her offspring before they have attained adolescence. The play need not be with toys, nor even be of the essence of a game. All that is meant by play is work done with such activity as to make a natural appeal to the young. And those who have experimented in evoking boys' real activities can tell us wonderful tales of zeal and application—can prove that the dividing-line between play and work done actively is so narrow as to be all but invisible.

## CHAPTER II

### THE TAUNT OF "MAKING THINGS TOO EASY"

THERE is one attack on Montessorism and other allied conceptions of education that we shall live down much later than most others—that which lies in the proposition that life being a struggle education must reflect throughout the school-going period something of the difficulties that have to be surmounted in the outside world. Although I can attach no importance whatever to this argument against activity in the school, because I believe that it is based on a very serious misconception, it would be very bad policy to let it pass without attempting a refutation.

In the first place the mere urging of such an objection shows only too clearly how far the critic is the victim of his own up-bringing. *He was taught to regard work as something so diametrically opposed to play that it took on an ineradicably disagreeable association.* He cannot conceive work rendered so active and adapted so well to the nature of the young that that disagreeable association never has the chance to arise. A boy's "objections to work" are not really



objections to work at all, but objections to work which does not give scope to his inner activities. Inactive work is abhorrent to him because it is to him simply a superior form of loafing, or rather an inferior form of loafing, inasmuch as it is neither for good nor for evil on the plane of his own being.

But if the critic means by “ making things easy ” that the subject-matter of the work must undergo profound modification before a “ lazy boy ” will surmount it even under conditions of activity, I can only say that my experience tends to a precisely opposite conclusion. I have known “ lazy boys ” get just as excited over French verbs as over any game they ever played. And if it is urged that because the boys are lazy the work done must have been easy, I reply that the work is neither *innately* more nor less easy than work under (for them) impossible conditions of inactivity. In short, they were not innately lazy, but too strong in natural activities to be able to substitute for them a purely artificial and uncongenial sort of concentration. Now if a boy is active in his work from infancy to adolescence, it is surely almost self-evident that he will have formed habits of concentration infinitely more permanent than if he has absorbed his knowledge in a way to which he was hostile because it contradicted the laws of his nature.

Instead of allowing a kitten to teach itself in its own way we might tie it in a chair and let

it watch other cats engaged in catching mice—but I think we might very well doubt the superiority of this over the older method of learning the art of the feline chase. In particular, I fancy the full grown cat's concentration on mouse-catching would have lost rather than gained by the change.

If there were any deep truth in the views of the "pro-difficulty" school of critics, no poet who had learned to write poetry for the sheer joy of the thing in early years would be such a good poet as he who had forced himself, in face of profound aversion, to study and apply the principles of versification; an actor ought rather to have studied than practised acting; and the mathematical genius should have neglected those sides of his subject which most appealed to him and for which he had most aptitude. In short we could only end in a *reductio ad absurdum*, implying that the aim of education is to contradict the natural tendencies of the individual, and that capacity allied with inclination is the road to intellectual ruin.

To me it seems simply preposterous to believe that disagreeable associations can ever have helped towards a better method of work. Even childhood gains, of course, by the difficulties which are *innate* in work as they are in life—but to say that a child learns better because its conditions of posture and behaviour are forced and unnatural is to imply more than can ever

be implied without landing oneself in a veritable quagmire of error and false reasoning.

All this is apart from the fact that the child, as Dr. Montessori would have proved if she had proved nothing else, has an extraordinary degree of concentration if once allowed to concentrate in his own way. And it has been equally demonstrated that this concentration is quite as striking in its varied application as in its intensity. The number of disagreeable household tasks a child will take up in a Montessori school and regard as play would be incredible but for the most convincing of ocular evidence. And once this play-association has developed, is it not reasonable to suppose that it will serve to increase the sum of cheerful work done in subsequent years ?

The great probability is that whatever the conscious reasoning of the critics I am seeking to answer, the unconscious basis of their tenets is the monastic tradition. There are deep-lying reasons why children should profit less rapidly by the progress of social evolution than any other body of human beings. The first and greatest of these is that concessions made from a governing to a governed class are generally gained by strife and by the capacity in the governed to support their claim, if needs be, by force. Human nature being usually either hard or indifferent, or, at the very least, impatient of changes which bring it no clear personal gain, has inevitably tended to give sophisticated

answers to the troublesome complaints of the child. So many other and stronger claims had to be met that even if the child did deserve a little more trust and a few more concessions to its nature, was it worth while to take the risk of a failure—quite apart from the increased trouble that the granting of a greater degree of self-government to the young would entail? How many children have escaped the two extremes of living under a system of external discipline and of being “spoiled” by that simulacrum of true liberty, mere indulgence, I cannot say; but I imagine the number of those who have grown up in freedom deliberately arranged and tending to evoke all their best activities is extraordinarily small.

So far as parents are concerned, the granting of complete freedom with the closest supervision and the most constant counsel and direction implies many years of the most real self-sacrifice. It is much easier to dress a very little child than to watch its laborious efforts to dress itself; and in many a poor home the mother is not in a position to devote so much time to a priceless factor in the evolution of the infant—the more especially since it is a factor the value of which she may not even have suspected.

But the excuse of the parent hardly applies to the schoolmaster. His business is to educate scientifically—and the basis of scientific education is the study of the child. That many centuries



of child study should have resulted in so little essential change in the method of teaching is one of the most saddening features in the social history of Europe. Saddening and humiliating ; for after all the message of Montessori is only a sort of deeper good sense. All that is essential in it is summed up in the two words, “ respect ” and “ watch ”—for any teacher who really respects his children and watches closely their development can hardly help arriving at the germ idea of Montessorism. That Montessorism can shock so many is simply a demonstration of the large number who have neither respected nor watched. (They have not even watched ; for he who watches a child must needs respect—must inevitably believe in its extraordinary capacity for self-development.)

This rather long digression has at least the value of tending to show that the world has done little to prepare itself for the new doctrine—and of going to explain the failure to rise to the conception of play-in-work as the true ideal of at least ante-adolescent education. The word “ play ” must be freed from all adult preconceptions of its meaning as the expression of the soul of the child. To us play (through the trend of our own education, reacted upon by the claims of an environment so strongly influenced in its turn by the same educational tendencies as our own) is essentially something apart from the main business of life. To a child it is life itself. Far

from precluding the useful it is the child's one conscious means of proceeding to useful ends. And once we offer him the absolutely useful as material on which to employ his energies he will welcome it with just the same avidity as that which he had hitherto regarded as useful on the evidence of his own subjective impressions.

Our scholastic system is based on a false analogy between the essence of concentration in childhood and that of later years. (And even in manhood it is to be noticed that we absorb infinitely better the knowledge which we seek ourselves than that which is imposed upon us from without.) Concentration on uninteresting work is to an adult difficult, but not in general impossible; to a child it is a complete contradiction of the laws of his being. If he is not interested he may learn certain mechanical principles underlying the subject-matter of his studies; but he never can and never will incorporate their spirit and their living force.

Does this mean that certain subjects now taught must be left alone until the child is ready to take to them of his own volition? Not necessarily, for, as I have already pointed out, there is an extraordinary versatility and power of adaptation in the young mind. There is no subject that carries with it the scope for really active work (active with both individual and collective activity) that will not make a definite appeal to childhood. Any child that likes to



overcome the varied difficulties of games will like to overcome the varied difficulties of school routine—provided that he can overcome them in his own way. I have tried to bore my boys with the duller sides of their subjects (that is the sides that were duller under the blight of silence and impassivity), and so long as they worked in partnership they have refused to be bored. Often, indeed, one finds that the theoretically duller work ends by fascinating the boys the most—because the essence of dull work is an accumulation of slight but constant difficulties. Taken rapidly these difficulties seem simply an exhilarating exercise; taken slowly and serially they spell profound boredom.

After all the work of Egeria has proved that children who have worked with real activity at school go out into the world with an extraordinary zest for the most unpromising of occupations. Therein lies this teacher's most valuable contribution to the new theory of education. No similar system has had a long enough trial to enable us to say how the children will adapt themselves to the humdrum pursuits to which most of us are fated. We have Mr. Edmond Holmes' authority for believing that Egeria's children carried their enthusiasm for work into the routine of the wage-earner. This is a truly great victory for the cause of freedom in childhood—and in some ways the greatest of all.

## CHAPTER III

### THE WASTAGE OF THE DIDACTIC METHOD

THE two main reasons why the didactic method has prevailed so long in schools are (*a*) that nobody has suggested another, and (*b*) that occasionally, owing to the genius of exceptional masters, it was possible to introduce into it some shade of individual activity on the part of the pupils. But these flashes of originality in applying a method that can hardly ever have completely satisfied the really understanding teacher, have only served to accentuate the general gloom overshadowing these centuries of education.

The outstanding evil is waste ; waste of time, waste of energy, waste of character and waste of opportunity. We have wasted time, because we have had either to base our questions on a purely imaginary average boy or else to individualise them, so that they are largely wasted so far as the listeners are concerned. We have wasted energy because we are doing the lion's share of the work, thus depriving the boy of that active participation which he demands as the

first condition of showing intelligent interest. We have wasted character for many reasons, but principally because we had little time to encourage original ways of working and because our discipline, owing to the abnormal inertia of the class, had to be external and based on punishments or rewards. We have wasted opportunity because every boy carries in him the secret of his own mental growth, and we had no means of inducing him to reveal himself.

If we examine an average form in any one subject, we are immediately struck by the extraordinary variety of degrees of knowledge possessed by different boys. Sometimes there is a gap of three forms between the top and the bottom pupils—for a boy's remove is not usually decided on his proficiency in any one subject. Nevertheless all are set to the same work, and are even given the same quantities of it to master. Either the demand is based on the powers of the top, of a middle or of the bottom boy—but however it is conditioned it can never be ideally fitted to more than, say, four or five boys out of twenty. For another four or five it will be deplorably unsuitable, and for the rest it will not be better than badly adjusted. If the evil ended here we might content ourselves with the expression of a mild dissatisfaction. But when we have added to this a uniformity of method which has no greater degree of adjustability to individual needs than the work itself; when we see the

clever boys tied with stupid boys for a sort of three-legged race with others equally hampered in their movements—then our disapproval takes on new force.

Now that I have had the opportunity of studying boys working in perfect freedom, I begin to understand the full measure of wrong done in the old way of teaching. The extent to which children differ in their method of work is almost incredible. In French some hitherto lazy but now enthusiastic boys tend to work almost incessantly with their pen; others only write when reminded by their partner, and seek nearly all their knowledge through conversation. Under the didactic system no allowance would be made for this difference (depending mostly, as I have proved, on whether the boy is stronger in visual or in auditory memory), and perhaps a third of the class would be at a disadvantage.

The actual loss of speaking-time enjoyed by each boy under the old as compared with the new system is simply immense. I suppose most masters have realized that in a French class of twenty, if they themselves speak half of each hour, a boy has only one minute and a half in which to express himself! Is it any wonder that even after seven years of this exiguous practice he is frequently at a loss to frame the simplest sentence? I am surprised that he speaks as well as he does, considering that his actual conversational practice in those seven years has probably



amounted to something like twenty-four hours !

As for encouraging originality, such a thing is clearly impossible where it depends on the direct evocation of the master, for he has the time neither to ask for individuality nor to study its manifestations. Indeed it is the troublesome side of individuality that becomes the greatest thorn in his flesh. And wheat and tares have to be sacrificed together, lest the mechanical side of the work should be sacrificed to the personal and human.

English literature is studied by the very slow reading of so many " books " recommended by the " locals " delegates—and the whole class must both read the same texts and maintain the same pace in the reading of them. No matter how much a boy longs to read *King Lear*, he must read *Julius Cæsar* ; no matter how much Shakespeare he would like to read, he is nailed to the unceasing study of one play, from which, judged from his own point of view, he seems to have extracted all the sap.

In this matter we have much to learn from the better elementary schools, where, within the limits of a well-chosen class-room library, a boy may read what he likes. This practice prevails also, I believe, in most schools in America. And it seems to me not only to be the best possible, but the only way of learning to appreciate good literature. Of course it does not preclude the

intensive study of certain short texts—but this sort of work should surely occupy much less time than that given to actual initiation into the beauties of literature. Any one who experiments on the lines of giving his pupils free choice among the best books will soon find with what extraordinary zest they read classics which would have irritated and discouraged them if supplied to them as “texts.” I have always noticed that even with what is treated on the “set-books” plan, the boys were delighted with the purely æsthetic beginnings of the work, and one could see at this stage a rapid evolution from the schoolboy (a monstrous type, infinitely remote from the uncorrupted original) to the boy of nature and of free self-development.

That any boy should regard either literature or history as a “bore” is the clearest proof of the deadening way in which they are taught. The idea of limiting history, for example, to the narrow study of a mere textbook is enough to kill in a boy even the most remarkable aptitude for his subject. Probably nothing fascinates the average youth more than full, richly-coloured reproductions of the past of nations. The “dramatic instinct” is strong enough to make him a crusader among crusaders, a baron among barons, and a bishop among revolting bishops. But he must have material to satisfy his imagination, and not be insulted by the offer of the lifeless chronicle of a self-proclaimed school-



book. And different boys will seek different sources of joy in their reading. The boy strong of physique and full of a higher animality will revel in great battles and victories over overwhelming odds ; a practical boy will see all in the light of invention and material progress ; some boy cast in a more delicate mould than either will respond to a note of poetry, to a touch of pageantry, to a subtle interplay of personalities. Each benefits most by that for which he is best adapted ; and none loses, because in the long run the roads converge and the boy emerges if with different (and, I hold, more valuable) views, at any rate much at the same point of practical acquaintance with his subject as that reached by his fellows.

In mathematics we have in an exaggerated form the worst evils resulting from differing rates of progress. If *festina lente* applies anywhere it applies to mathematics. The great probability is that nobody need be quite such a hopelessly bad mathematician as so many of us are—as I am myself—if we were not rushed through a series of “ rules ” and principles before we had had time properly to master one. In no other subject is the laggard quite so much at the mercy of the proficient. I can dimly remember that I used rather to enjoy doing mathematical work on a portion of the subject that I thoroughly understood ; but hardly had I had time to form this pleasant association than I was dragged along

till I was out of my depth—and had become once more the sworn foe of mathematicians and all their works.

There seems to be no obvious remedy so long as collective teaching continues to be the working ideal. Even with a system that pays the maximum of attention to the arrangement of forms and classes and "sets," the adjustment of the pace of different boys is beyond hope of attainment—the excessive "speeding-up" of one and the equally wasteful retarding of another is an evil innate in the traditional method of teaching, and cannot be removed until we have removed its cause.

But the worst effects of the collective method are of a more general character. They lie in the inevitable discouragement of originality, in the excessive prominence of the master, in the mechanical tendencies of the work, in the substitution for education in its true etymological sense of what we might call "injection" (or forcible inoculation with unasked-for facts). The greatest hope of the new school lies, I fancy, in using human material that has hitherto been rendered almost useless, and in showing that it may be the best of all material. The model boy of unlimited powers of artificial concentration is destined probably, under a system based on activity and personal work, to sink at least to the middle of the form; I see my Superman much nearer the bottom than the top of existing classes.

I shall not here anticipate the conclusions to which this book is tending, and therefore I postpone till later the consideration of my remedy for the state of affairs which has prevailed in slightly differing forms since the dawn of education. At present I am only concerned with showing—what so many even among the most conservative teachers already know—that we have been working for thousands of years to a wholly wrong conclusion. It is a dreadful thought that through all those ages we had no single child educated intelligently in an atmosphere of active freedom or of free activity to oppose to those brought up under a system of organized repression. But the New Child has now been seen and the seed of a new philosophy of childhood has at last been sown. It is perhaps for another generation to reap the wonderful harvest. The doctrine of Montessorism is possibly the most priceless contribution ever made to the wisdom of the world, and if its greatest value is on the constructive side, its first function will be to criticize and to destroy.

## CHAPTER IV

### WAYS TO ACTIVITY

IN a preceding chapter it was admitted that as early as the sixteenth century great teachers had tried the experiment of turning work into play, and had proved to the satisfaction of their contemporaries that better results are secured when children follow than when they contradict the line of their natural choice. Such men as Ratichius, Comenius and—later on—Wolke, seem to have gained an approval for their aims such as would hardly be so generally accorded to a teacher having similar ideals in our own day. But whatever the moral support they enjoyed, they failed to induce any large number of teachers to follow in their footsteps.

I have endeavoured, in searching among records of various educational experiments, to find any modern successful effort to introduce complete activity, individual and collective, into the school class; but, with the one exception of Miss Finlay Johnson's emancipation of her children in a Sussex village school, I have failed to discover the practice of any new theory having more



than a special and localized application. Of course teachers have varied enormously in the degree of activity they have secured—from that attained by the sphinx-like, monosyllabic queller of the superfluous snapping of a finger to the joyous “big brother” who, within the mechanical limitations of time and of numbers, encourages every spontaneous impulse which is not hurtful or disturbing to others. But when all is said, teaching a collectivity suggests limitations much rather than a charter of freedom, even in regard to the most innocent manifestations of personality.

But Miss Finlay Johnson undoubtedly did wonders in her Sussex village, and although I have a different—and, I only hope, parallel—remedy to offer, I must here burn a little incense to what I consider to be one of the most interesting and convincing educational experiments ever carried out. Nothing is more remarkable—nor should be more flattering to our national pride—than that Miss Finlay Johnson had completed her experiment before the name of Montessori had been whispered in this country.

Of the dramatic method of teaching—for, after all, that was the basis of Miss Johnson’s system, and the ingredient necessary to an activity without which freedom can never be accorded to children—I shall here say no more than that it is applicable wherever the right teacher can be found to apply it, and that its supreme virtue,

so far as younger children are concerned, is that it is in close psychological relation with a recognized instinct of early development in all human beings. Even without outside suggestion all children have a quite obvious love of "make-believe," and it is no more than the fulfilment of an *a priori* probability that history and arithmetic (the last learned through a shopkeeping game) should have been better mastered on these than on conventional lines of teaching.

Much has been written directly and indirectly about the success of this method, but what I have found most stimulating to the imagination is the remarkable idealism that this gifted teacher found—and that before Montessori had taught us what to expect—in a school that she had gradually emancipated from all external punishments and rewards. Some of the miracles of auto-education—particularly in the matter of drawing—which have been described elsewhere, show clearly that free activity in the school is capable of developing simultaneously and at a quite extraordinary pace both the intellect and the æsthetic and moral senses.

Having thus paid my homage to a remarkable achievement of child-emancipation in an elementary school, I am free to state why I think that the dramatic method alone, even in the hands of a specially endowed secondary schoolmaster, could not supply the whole foundation of our system of teaching. It has first to be remarked

that while the dramatic instinct in children is both to be recognized, and as far as possible provided for, it is only one of many instincts that we have hitherto starved and neglected. And there are others—such as what we may call respectively the constructive and the research instincts—which seem to me to be more essential, and to offer in a less degree the danger of over-development. If acting teaches the child to imagine and to sympathize, it might eventually (I hasten to say that we have proofs that it did not do so as employed by Miss Finlay Johnson) weaken the sense of intellectual truth and soften the moral fibre.

I proceed now to my own view of what is the best general remedy for existing inertia in the school—dealing with it for the moment on its theoretical side, and leaving all practical description till a later chapter.

How are we to get activity from every boy in a class of, let us say, twenty-six (the number of letters in the alphabet)? Let us look at a class of the existing type—an imaginary but an average one—and suppose that it is studying French. Tabulated: (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) could recognize at once the meaning of *Est-ce que vous avez vu le Tsar?* and each could reply to it after a moment's thought; (f), (g), (h) and (i) would probably understand *Est-ce que vous avez vu . . .*, but would reply in more or less correct French to an imaginary question about



*le chat*; (j), (k), (l), (m), (n) and (o) will be able laboriously to piece together the elements contained in *Est-ce que vous avez vu* . . . , but will be quite incapable of framing a reply; from (p) to (z) the question will vary from a difficult puzzle to "double Dutch." But suppose, on the contrary, my question is *Est-ce que la porte est fermée?* That question can be answered even by (w) and (x)—(y) and (z) seem incapable of answering any question whatsoever—but to the boys from (a) to let us say (l) the reply is as easy as saying anything in English, and therefore has practically no drill-value at all.

Of course I shall be charged with deliberately making out a bad case for collective teaching, but even if this example is a very slight exaggeration of the evils of the old system, I think the enlightened teacher will admit that it is not a sheer distortion of the facts of the case.

My impression is that not one schoolmaster in ten realizes the depths of sullen hopelessness to which questions "pitched" even for (m) reduce (v) and still more (z); or the sense of wasted time produced in the mind of (e) when the question is based on the capacity of (r). Whatever the principle on which the interrogations are arranged there will be a huge misadjustment somewhere.

Now are these evils remediable so long as the master takes his class collectively? I hold that they are not. No amount of the most



ingenious "pitching" of questions can remove the fact that no single question has ever quite the same value for any four—let alone twenty-six—boys. So that on top of the inactivity imposed by stress of numbers and of limited opportunity, we have the further crushing influence of inappropriate evocation of knowledge. At least half the form is always suffering by hearing questions that are either beyond its intelligent comprehension or below the level of its own attainments. To say that a whole form can satisfy under these conditions my demand for "a combination of individual with collective activity" is to allege what cannot possibly be true.

If the master cannot teach with success collectively, he cannot teach "distributively," that is he cannot take the boys individually or in groups at all. Thus all hope of a solution so long as we depend for it on the master as direct teacher of his class is excluded. To whom, then, must we turn? The traditionalist can only answer "to nobody." To the open-minded man of logic there is an alternative answer, but an answer that will probably condemn itself, at the first blush, as unconsciously absurd. It will come, in any case, tentatively, timidly, interrogatively. *To the boys?*

What an absurdity! Boys teach one another! There would be a bear-garden in half an hour, if not in ten minutes! What inaccuracy!

What neglect of vital principles! What subterfuges of pretended activity! What a chance for "ragging" and for escape from all the restraints of healthy discipline! . . . Is it not so? . . . NO, disappointing as it may be, paradoxical as it may be to those who have never seen the boy beneath the schoolboy, *it is not so!* It is precisely the contrary. In a few minutes the only "rag" is the excitement of work made active till it takes on a new and delightful association, and turns to play—to rich and beautiful play, to the game of overcoming difficulties step by step, to that rapid exercise which holds the young spell-bound as they feel from moment to moment their rapidly growing power. For weeks this goes on, till dullard after dullard comes up to an average level he had never dreamt of attaining, till an hour will pass without the need even for an encouraging word from the master.

No longer a look of hopelessness, no longer anywhere a vestige of discouragement. Each boy makes his own pace, each boy makes his own method—a wonderful method that nobody else could ever have invented for him—each boy frames his own work with the loving care of the genius he is when his own self-development is the prize. All this comes almost at once if he is no more than twelve or thirteen—uncorrupted by much past imprisonment. With a boy of sixteen it may take from six to eight weeks to reawaken his sleeping

powers of initiative. The worst are the "cage birds," as I call them—the dutiful little slaves of the system of repression. They, poor boys, are lost at first, and know not where to turn. Then they see themselves beaten hopelessly by the "slacker" of a few weeks ago—now happy, free and soaring; and it is then that they begin to see that the wires of that cage are not impassable. But it is they, never that famous "hopeless" boy, who fly the last. Because there is no greatness in them. No sane man would ever look first for greatness to the top of a class; fifth from the bottom would be, on the average, a promising place to keep an eye on. It is a miracle of adaptability when a great-souled boy can remain great and still rise to the top of a collectively-taught class. And the best are not generally the best at adapting themselves to the wearing of needless chains.

I apologize for talking a foreign language, but it is the language we shall all be talking soon, and we have to get used to its strange accents. It is difficult indeed to swallow at one gulp the fact that the admitted great men of the world have succeeded in spite of, and not because of, their greatness. If I were to meet the spirit of Shakespeare, and if I were not too much alarmed at the *rencontre*, I would first wager him that he was never near the top of his classes. I would add that he would have never been anywhere else if he had been free to work actively and in his

own way in a class conducted on partnership lines. I am sure he would agree with me.

I claim for this system—which will be dealt with fully and from a purely practical point of view later on—(a) that it is the only possible means of adapting work to the craving for activity of the lazy (that is, generally speaking, those boys who had in the beginning a particular love of rapidly overcoming difficulties); (b) that it alone can pay any real regard to originality; (c) that there is no other way of maintaining a suitable rate of progress for differing degrees of intelligence; and (d) that it is the sole satisfactory outlet for great gifts in the school-going period of life. Hitherto no single human being has ever been properly measured while he was at school, because nobody had a fair chance to follow the lines of his own development.



## CHAPTER V

### DISCIPLINE IN FREEDOM

JUST as a man would find it extremely difficult to be good if he were compelled to lead the restless existence of a child, so few children can long be good if they are constrained to be as passive and inert as an average man. There is no "innate evil" in this, and he who holds that there is must needs be innately stupid, or at least innately illogical. It is simply the same law of nature that makes a fish rebel against efforts to teach it the advantages of a siesta on the grass, or that leads a wild bird to see charms in a wider world than can be found inside the most spacious and beautiful cage. It is a fact of nature that we should not only accept, but to which we should adjust the underlying principles of our system of education.

Without activity no child can in any practical sense be free. Otherwise a child placed in the midst of a desert would be held to be free, whereas we know that it could nowhere else have less real freedom. Hence no argument is to be drawn from the moral failures incidental to an

inactive childhood. A young boy revolts just as naturally from hours of impassivity as we grown-ups would revolt from the effort to impose on us a day of ceaseless movement. The indulgently treated "only son" may have a certain measure of what we may call spatial freedom, but he has little of any other kind; for few provisions are made for the encouragement of his childish instincts, and he is left to make the most of a life which is half imitation of what is practically another species of human being, and half repression of his own efforts to grow in nature's own way. When he proves ill-adapted to later association with his peers, this is due much less to "indulgence" (although the word has just as disagreeable an association for the understanding apostle of liberty as for the repressionist) than to a failure to arrange for the child an environment to which his nature can directly respond.

The brutal and the indulgent inhibition of child activities come very much to the same thing. The brute forcibly shuts the child's mouth and punishes it if it moves; the indulgent elder teaches a child that it must not be expected to do anything for itself—no matter how much it longs to—because it is "so little." Either treatment is well calculated to produce a machine, if it does not produce a rebel, and both have tended to produce rebels in the unhappily few cases in which they did not produce machines.

If the machines had been even good machines we should have had much less to complain of ; but they were machines of such small range of application and so monstrously alike that one was beginning, about the time of the coming of Montessori, to pray for more rebels.

Montessorism has two grievances against the old-fashioned type of teacher—that he is apt to repress the finest manifestations of that activity which is essential to healthy growth, and that when he is not deeply guilty in this direction he frequently “ nurses ” his pupils out of all power to rely on their own endeavours. Now the natural boy—and this has been proved by Montessori, by Miss Finlay Johnson, and, I venture to say, by myself—has an intense love of doing everything for himself. Whether you interfere with this tendency forcibly or by a mistaken kindness, he will be equally ungrateful—at least until his nature has been corrupted by practice to dependence on others. He loves difficulties as he loves light and air, but he does not love to be seized by the hand and rushed across broken country, hardly setting foot to earth, by some wiseacre who knows everything but the nature of his victim.

In partnership work none of these difficulties exist. Each boy works on happily at his own stage of development and at his own pace—which is always infinitely the fastest in the long run. He is happy in his activity and has no need of

outside distractions, and so his conduct gets progressively better and gradually extends to a desire to write neatly, to be tidy, to be light of foot, to be polite to other boys and to be frank and open in his dealings with his master. The latter he sees in a new light, as the first adult human being who has really understood the inner cravings of his nature for active occupation—as the first adult human being who has believed in his natural goodness and his desire to grow wisely and well. And that master gets a colossal power, a power which no master under a system of repression can ever have. Issuing no commands, delivering no ultimata, his lightest hint is a command, a grave look has the weight of an ultimatum.

If you go through the catalogue of ordinary school offences you will find mighty few that have any innate evil whatsoever. Nine times out of ten these faults are Nature's reassertion of the child's inalienable right to express itself in speech and movement with more vigour and continuity than the adult. Some lunatic having evolved the idea, six thousand or more years ago, that boys must do their work precisely in the same way as adults, we have made that our ideal of education ever since. Whence a farcical pretence at discipline, which was in point of fact no discipline at all, since there can be no discipline where we are handcuffed, fettered and gagged—even though the gag, the fetters and the handcuffs are not



always tight enough quite to prevent a little speech and an occasional movement.

Punishments are a splendid way of making a really spirited boy do mischievous things that he would never dream of doing if the punishments did not exist. This fact, which many grown-up people have forgotten, is a commonplace with boys. You will probably be able to get it, by the Socratic method, from the very first boy you meet.

Nevertheless it is possible that in a more or less inactive class, taken by a master collectively, either punishments or rewards (which are only inverted punishments) are a necessity. No boy who was full of sap and vigour would reduce himself to the rank of a servile listener for five hours a day without some stimulus. Those who can do so easily may rise to the top of the class, but I question very seriously whether "apart from the context" it is a case of the survival of the fittest. A great boy will not only be great in, but great in the defence of, his nature. The fact that such a boy, worsted but not unconverted, ends by being "a sullen lout" proves that the system has scored some sort of a vile victory, but it does not, and never can prove, that the boy was not made for infinitely better things.

If there is no truth in this contention, what of the Little Commonwealth and the wonderful capacity shown by young criminals (and criminals once held to be "hopeless" at that) in self-

government? *I am not at all convinced that the full extent of these moral victories is not directly due to the fact that nature had marked out some of her moral derelicts to be her moral heroes.* Rebels against school repression, they also rebelled, illogically but naturally enough, against even the larger repression of the world. But such daring theories are probably too far advanced for our age of black-and-white psychology and of unimaginative preconceptions, so I shall urge them no further.

You cannot mould childhood in a mould of adult devising—no matter how ideal that mould may theoretically seem to be. And all efforts to do so must needs mean the deforming of the young nature—no matter on what pinnacle we choose to set any particular product of the process of deformation. The moral nature, like the intellectual, has suffered to a great, to an inestimable extent, by our system of repression. If even the infant—a creature that nature made selfish so that it might live—can learn in freedom ways of orderliness, of gentleness, of intense concentration, of adaptability to an artificially contrived environment, one asks what would not this new type have become, once arrived at an age that Nature meant to be more altruistic and more highly socialized?

I must not here dwell on what my boys have taught me, because the moral results of partnership work are to be considered in detail in future pages. I will only say now that all that I have

seen has gone to confirm the results obtained by others, has accorded to a most convincing extent with the theory that education in perfect liberty gives us a moral strength and a moral initiative in the many such as one could only get from a very few under a system of external discipline.

So much for the moral effects of freedom. But if they are great, how much greater are the effects of activity! For activity is the first of all essentials of healthy growth in early years. If we could see clearly through the mist of long habit and inveterate prejudice, we should hardly find a child who was not a mere caricature of his natural self, robbed, as he had been, of all that was best in his nature in order to leave room either for all that was worst or that was most commonplace in his environment.

Of course the followers of Montessori must be prepared to say why they believe that good morals can be learned brightly and positively much better than they can be learned gloomily and in the light of a mere negation of evil. For here we touch upon an obvious source of attack on the new discipline. The answer is very nearly the same as that which we have to give (and which I have given) to the charge of "making things too easy" in the sphere of the intellect. Once children are free their will is to gain power on the lines of the interest placed before them. Thus if we desire to make children tidy we need

and should say little about the negative "untidiness," but let them see, first, if necessary, by games, and then by suggestion, that the effort to be tidy, like every other effort, can be a manifestation of natural activity. Still later (if the lesson has not yet been learned) it should be associated with the general growth towards a love of order, as well as with instances of applied order, derived, for example, from birds' nests, from the engineering works of the beaver, from mathematics, from the carpenter's shop. Physical orderliness should also be made to suggest and be suggested by the idea of order in the expression of thought.

If this way of teaching moral principles seems to imply an unjustifiable belief in childhood, I venture to assert that no one who has seen a free child could possibly doubt that the results would be a hundredfold better than those obtained by any system of inhibition. The first desire of the free child is to excel on lines of activity, just as the first desire of the caged child is to have its needs provided for. And if anybody says: "That is not my experience of freedom," I can only repeat once more that since there can be no approach to real freedom save in a specially contrived school, this "experience" is not experience of the child we are speaking of, but of some unhappy midway type between the products of two systems.

It is singular that one body of critics should



be dubious of Montessorism as an effective means to produce a high moral type ; and that another should only wonder whether the type educed will not be too fine and too ideal for a harsh and clumsy world !

To my mind it is simply and solely a question of opposing Activity to Inertness as means to moral development. Nothing in this world, especially in the sphere of conduct, can be mathematically certain ; but if anything may be assumed it is surely that the greatest danger in childhood is to choke the natural outlets of self-expression, and to inhibit even so much of movement and of speech as is essential to true growth. And that is what is being done to-day in very nearly every school in the Occident. So that if stone-throwing begins, the aggressors had better remember that their house is made of very thin glass, and that a new building is not *ipso facto* the weakest, more particularly when the materials of which it is constructed are the product of a new theory and of scientific laws in process of reconstruction.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE BOY VERSUS THE SCHOOLBOY

Most people talk about "boys" as though they had ever seen one. I have never seen one myself, but I have seen them in the making, and so I venture to point out that the "schoolboy" is about as remote from the true boy as the kettledrum is from the violin.

The schoolboy is a highly specialized product of a curious and entirely unnatural environment. Having spent endless hours sitting in unnaturally cramped positions, having been silenced when he spoke, having been told what he ought and ought not to do for almost every conjuncture in life, having been reduced gradually towards the level of a mere machine—he emerges into a play-world where all his companions have been through a precisely similar performance. If he is not quite a machine, he comes out more or less rebellious and is ready for plots and privy conspiracies against a system which he feels subconsciously is all wrong—*but only so far as he is concerned*. He is not sufficiently free of mind to have generalized, even if he has reached the

age to do so, but he does feel that he has been loafing, and he does feel that he does not want to loaf if he can see a clear and natural way to do otherwise. He is at once humbled and hardened, and he flies naturally to others who have been humbled and hardened like himself. This is not deliberate but purely instinctive.

A subtle poison spreads which most people would not identify as a poison at all—the poison which creates the illusion that work is one thing (and a hated and horrible thing), and that play is another (the lifting off one's shoulders of a dreadful incubus, irresponsible abandonment to the joy of not-work). He quickly loses all sense that play is play because it is work, and of course he is quite incapable of realizing that the work which has baffled him would have been play if he could have handled it briskly and progressively, and in his own way. Besides, what good would it be if he did realize it, if he had to go on doing it at other people's rate of progress and in other people's way?

The young boy is very apt to think sincerely that his master is an ass. The master would say that that was because the young boy was a greater ass himself. In point of fact he is at an age when nature still whispers facts in his ear, and she tells him in her own hyperbolic way, that wisdom should listen as well as talk, even when it is a matter of listening to a very small boy. If the master came down from his throne, and let the

boy teach him a little, not only would he be on the way to a great reform, but he would be placed by that boy on a throne that had grown upwards by some fairy process and gained in majesty.

But such masters are so rare that schoolboys have never ceased to maintain their general attitude of stubborn revolt. And the revolt has left a deep impress on their natures. Every inhibition of school hours tends to suggest a corresponding licence in the playground or in the home. Correct speech in the class-room suggests outside an orgy of slang, silence suggests noise, the preaching of beauty the almost wilful cult of ugliness—and so on *ad infinitum*. School life spells inaction followed by reaction; and reaction is the very soul of the schoolboy.

But in the boy himself there is little of all this. His natural impulse is to be learning, and if his activities are properly provided for he will be learning till he falls asleep. He is too sociable to remain long rough of manner or to revolt against any surroundings in which his nature has the least real scope. He learns quickly to perceive beauties of colour, of sound and of form. He has a natural tendency to order, and even an infant who is directed without repression will find a joy in "putting things away." He comes soon to detest violence, while he never ceases to adore strength. He is endlessly forgiving of wrongs—otherwise he would have been



driven to rage and despair by the system of the silent class.

This attribution of pleasant traits is not a matter of surmise. Any one who studies Montessori's results, and then tries the experiment of giving boys freedom in activity, will have a double proof of their unquestionable existence. Nothing is more astounding than the rapidity with which the natural boy will, under these conditions, come to light and replace the "school-boy." The schoolboy will not willingly admit that anything is "beautiful"; the natural boy will find the fitting word for his reverent admiration, and will use it, unsuspicious of ridicule. The schoolboy considers a graceful courtesy as something from which he is absolved; the natural boy is courteous in a graceful way through the play of a potent social instinct. The schoolboy thinks of his work as something alien and repulsive; the natural boy has no contempt for "shop," and has much less marked preferences in the choice of a field for his activities.

It is strange that the philosophy underlying evolution brings us to conclusions reached independently by certain religious sects such as the Quakers. Evolution suggests immediately a presumption that an instinct towards upward progression will be found in the young of all animals. And if our minds had hitherto been blank as to the tendencies of young human life, we should have to imagine that the child would

be incessantly occupied in preparing itself for its final *rôle* as a being embodying the best of its type. Neither does the survival value of man depend exclusively, nor even predominantly, on his physical characteristics. Both intellectual and moral strength have had a crucial value in determining human progress. It is therefore far more logical to presuppose that even in the child there is a clear line of moral and intellectual advance—until we have dragooned him into the abnormally rebellious and unaccommodating product of our schools.

I take it that the “red tooth and claw” reading of universal nature is rapidly being replaced in the mind of thinking people by the view that the fighting instinct is only a stage on the way to that compromise which ends in co-operation. And, without going so far as Prince Kropotkine, one must surely admit that even pre-human evolution offers countless examples of active mutual aid invoked as a means to survival. Throughout the human period itself individual strength has played a small part as compared with the mighty *rôle* enacted by the clan and the community—that is to say by the results of co-operative living. But it will nevertheless be a long time before the last of the scientific pessimists will have surrendered to the growing force of scientific optimism. And the scientific pessimist will meantime be a real source of danger to the spread of this idea of the

innate desire of the child to fulfil its destiny as the young of a highly socialized and socially advancing species.

We shall have at first to encounter much condemnation of the types we produce—even though they may ultimately be shown to mark, from the point of view of practical living, an immense advance upon ourselves. The product of a free childhood will be so innately different from all the children we have ever seen that a large number of us are bound to criticize it simply on the grounds of the divergence from an accepted type. It must be remembered that the finer type of man has never made much appeal to the less fine average. He whom we turn out of our ideal school will talk too much or too little according to whether he talks more or less than existing young men ; he will be “ sentimental ” if he feels more deeply, or “ cold ” if he despises existing sentimentality ; his taste will be bad if it is independent of accepted tradition ; he will be graceless if his grace is of a new and startling kind ; he will be a fool or at least a crank if he preaches a new wisdom. So that those timid folk who say, “ We must wait and see what freedom has to give us,” should, in a strictly logical timidity, go much further and suggest waiting till these new types have had time to be accepted by the intolerant and conventional elements in the public.

Luckily there is something, quite apart from



the producing of a higher type of individual, which I look to as a means of reconciling the more unimaginative (to whom higher types are unimaginable). I mean the mere securing of an individual that has an obvious mechanical efficiency—an individual certain to survive economically, because possessing a higher intellectual, sensory and physical development. There is no essential contradiction between powers of a commonplace kind and those of an intellectual or a spiritual kind. In the world as it exists now we sometimes do see an incompatibility between the "practical" and the non-practical types, but this is due rather to a deficiency of symmetrical training in one or the other direction, than to innate lack of power (granted the requisite exercise of each) to do the work of the other. And we are beginning to believe that even the philosopher might have been a greater philosopher for a little early training in carpentry, and the carpenter a more efficient carpenter for the mind-training of a little philosophy. Since a co-operatively-educated boy would tend much more towards symmetrical development than boys in existing schools (because the mind of the natural boy is more symmetrical than that of the schoolboy), I think we could count on giving the world a man who would touch, taste, hear, speak, walk, run, write, command, obey, arrange and destroy as well as think, better than we can do these things ourselves. And does not



that mean that the writing of poetry and the driving of an engine would be less divorced as interests than they are now ?

No system of education is likely to win among many contending systems unless it can show that one of its first advantages is to be able to fit boys to respond to the calls of modern life. Whether we admire *la haute finance* or machine-made boots or the modern newspaper is not the question. While reserving to ourselves the right to make a school as beautiful and as humanizing as the circumstances will allow, we must be able, in fairness to our boys (apart from the views of their parents), to say : " Failing an accident, that boy can never starve."

Now I contend that the true boy will have a survival value to which the schoolboy could never pretend. To begin with he will be helped by nature's own powers of adaptation, which, when nobody seeks to replace them by artificial powers of adaptation, are extraordinarily strong. I have already dwelt upon native human versatility as found even in infancy, and on the power of young children to fix their mind upon almost anything, once the matter for concentration allows free play for personal activity. This feature of young life, which Montessori has done much to bring into prominence, is of supreme importance in the matter of vocational as well as of general training. It seems to suggest that loafing to the child brought up on lines of perfect

freedom would be a process as difficult and painful as it now appears to be inviting; and, over and above this, one can see boundless opportunities for taking advantage, on the culture or general side, of this elasticity of interests, and, on the side of vocational specializing, of that intense concentration which, anomalously enough, now appears to be capable of as high development in childhood as in adult years.

I have given more space to this comparison of the boy with the schoolboy than I should have otherwise deemed necessary, because it appears to me that without a very complete sense that the schoolboy is not the real boy, we shall run perpetually the risk of arguing from false analogies. Indeed it is the drawing of a false analogy, whether in this connection or in associating indulgence with active freedom, or in arguing from collective to individual teaching, that will, for a long time to come, cause most waste of time by giving us problems to solve which are problems only through some *non sequitur* on the part of those who propound them.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE GREATEST OF ALL HUMAN HOPES

IF the schools had done their work well, it is probable that nearly every human being would have some immediately obvious charm. There is hardly a living soul but once had in him the beginnings of originality, of constructive power, of a sense of beauty. It is as natural, I maintain, for the unimprisoned brain to give birth to fine thoughts as for the body of a woman to bear a perfectly formed child. Why, then, this dull level of unimaginative reasoning, this dreadful monotony of utterance, this mean contempt for all that has greatness and splendour? Because the soul of man has never grown as nature would have it grow—*because there was a stage of evolution through which as a race we had to pass—a stage at which we learned how to inhibit, but at which we did not know how to set free. The will to guard and to develop the freedom of another can only come when man is entering upon a supremely great stage of racial development.*

It is for the philosopher to work out the wider meaning of this daring statement of the case

(which, I hold, is quite obviously true in the light of recent educational experiment); my present aim is merely to show its significance in so far as it relates to the children in our schools. When Emerson said that the secret of education lay "in respecting the child," the full value of his meaning (all of which he may not have realized) was that each child was a little cosmos, knowing more about itself than it could express, but also knowing infinitely more about the relation of its own impulses to the laws of its own progress than any outsider could ever know. It was to be the aim of the master to watch these impulses reverently and to turn them to account in his methods of instruction.

To be just to the education at least of the past twenty or thirty years there has been some movement in this direction. But so long as teachers are hampered by the circumstance of having to teach collectively (which carries with it an inevitable tendency to address oneself to a non-existing average type), the scope for adaptation to individual needs must always be extremely restricted.

This necessary neglect of individuality has had the most deplorable effects, in that nine-tenths of the dynamic force of a school class has had to be sacrificed, that true individualized knowledge has been replaced by a sort of average mental food for which no natural boy has more than a weak and acquired appetite, that ten thousand



opportunities for constructive development have been missed while we satisfied ourselves with dragging our pupils along roads not only repulsive to them, but leading to no goal of adequate personal achievement. Our very school books have till very recently reflected this unimaginative contempt for the individual; and even now I notice that many boys *tend to learn more from simple books written for adults* than from text-books supposed to be adapted to their own needs—because the adult book usually contains a glimmering of that purely personal appeal which is nearly always wanting in the arid pages of school books.

With a system of teaching through partnerships we enter an entirely different world. The activity generated by the reduction of the class-group from twenty or more to two has a magic effect on the concentration of the boys, and on their natural tendency to satisfy their own curiosity in their own way. We then begin to see something of the extraordinary range of “right” methods of work, and to learn, on the evidence of natural tendencies, that what was a right way for B was a hopelessly wrong way for A. Very soon we have instances of boys’ clever inventions, of devices to help the memory, of ingenious ways of questioning; and all of these things have *ipso facto* a psychological aptness which can never be guaranteed in an idea imposed by the master. Originality grows by what it feeds on, while the

merely rebellious side of originality is suppressed by its sovereign antidote, a happy activity. I have seen boys who had hitherto seemed dull and crushed and indifferent to their work emerge, after a few weeks of partnership teaching, bright-eyed and full of zeal, and brimming over with a new-found hope. The conservative teacher might say: "So they might under any other system"—ignoring the fact that those boys who have now found their intellectual salvation were but yesterday dull and hopeless and incapable of rising up clear from their discouragement.

If one believes, as I believe, that these "dull" or vagabond types tend to hide with considerable frequency a very high order of initiative and originality, the moral becomes evident. By quickening the activity of our classes we are helping to revitalize the spirit of our youth, to add a new force to the inspiration of society, to quicken the pace of social evolution. To eliminate the loafer would in itself be much; to accomplish all that the elimination of the loafer implies is to have started on the making of a new and a more beautiful world.

No less important is the fact that the boys *now seek knowledge instead of being invited to receive it in doses of our arranging*. What they learn is fresh and real to them; they transmute mere information into an individualized possession of their own. The way in which a boy, failing to learn what he wants to from his partner,

questions his master, is something quite new and inspiring. One feels that one is feeding a growing flame instead of quenching one fire in order to kindle another.

Nobody who looks back over his early school-days can fail to notice how clearly something that he learned voluntarily, during holidays or when ill, or in connection with a favourite subject, comes back to his consciousness, graphic and vivid ; whereas no matter how well one may have kept the memory of some uncongenial subject, even known well (at least from the examination point of view), it invariably lacks form, and has little power of spontaneous presentation to one's mind. I can remember practically nothing of the work done in a kindergarten to which I was sent between the ages of four and nine ; but no early image is stronger in my mind than are certain pictures in *Wood's Natural History*. I can still see the pictorial cover, the gilt edges, sundry woodcuts of silvery gibbon, lynx and cobra ; I can remember *joyous* struggles to understand the lengthy words in the descriptive text. In the kindergarten I gained no doubt many facts ; at home I gained those indelible pictures that are for the little child the true highway to knowledge.

It is this sort of realized, individualized knowledge that we must offer to our children, because it means an infinite gain to their mental development. " Knowledge sought is good, knowledge



unsought is not true knowledge" is a perverted parody that tells the exact truth. And children will seek knowledge all day and every day—will seek any knowledge you ask them to—if you will let them seek it actively and in their own way. Tell them where the thing is hidden and they will not only rejoice in finding it, but will not quickly forget where it lay. But find it yourself and *announce* its lurking-place, and the fact will be as a snowflake on the window-pane of a well-warmed room. The natural child loves research, as he loves also creation. We cannot say dogmatically that nearly any one might be great with an appropriate provision for free development from earliest years, but there is a growing probability that this statement is not far from the truth.

The future, I believe, is going to be a future abounding in proofs that there is no innately commonplace type, but that the commonplace type is an artificial product of repression. There must always, probably, be degrees of originality—for the very fact that some yield so easily to repression seems to prove that their originality is of inferior texture; but it seems to be nearly proved that undreamt-of stores of personal power have been destroyed by the clumsy methods of a repressive education.

These revolutionary theories will not be justified in a day, or a year—and perhaps not in their entirety for a considerable portion of a century.



In the first place it does not follow that even with the most ideal arranging of free activities we are going to work miracles with children who have already been moulded to passive obedience. And the failure to do so will react unpleasantly upon the apostles of revolt. There is no certain limit at which we may say that it is too late to try the revivifying effects of a well-controlled freedom; but there is no doubt, in practice, that the older boy, through the vices of his training, responds much less readily than his juniors to the stimulating influence of enlarged opportunity. I certainly found that my own boys made progress at a rate in precisely inverse proportion to their age. This fact, while disappointing to a master having control of boys of sixteen and upwards, is at the same time a glorious proof of *the natural basis on which the system is reposed*. The child of nature takes to it joyfully, while the product of an artificial education has to undergo what we may call a tuning process before his early instincts can be revived. But as I have only one really unpromising boy out of more than fifty—and he was a most dutiful boy under the system of repression, if mild repression, which I have abandoned—I claim that any boy may reasonably be expected in the long run to adapt himself to the new conditions of work.

Nobody can have long experimented on the lines of free activity without having noticed

some remarkable transformations of personality. Nothing is more striking than the immediate effects of freedom on that curious aversion of boys to express judgments on abstract topics. I can now ask my pupils questions implying a highly abstract reply that I should not have dreamed of expecting before they had undergone the changes incidental to individualized work. Then I notice in a very few weeks remarkable progress in the power to *realize* characters in the reading aloud of Shakespeare and even in those of prose fiction. It is a commonplace with my boys to remark to me how "So-and-so is coming out," and how he is "getting more original," and how "X would never talk about anything till this term."

There is then much more in this partnership idea even than the arousing of a new enthusiasm, although that would be worth sacrificing much to secure. There is the reawakening of the creative power; there is the restoring of the constructive, the dramatic and the social instincts. There is the moving of the stimulus to action from outside to within. There is the growing sense of personal responsibility and the strengthening of will-power and the growth of concentration.

I expect no easy victory, because I am working on a field where so far there has been a minimum of encouragement for the innovator and none at all for the revolutionary. The idea of freedom

in the school has come to stay, but it cannot in the nature of things make the rapid progress of a mechanical invention or even of a new political system. My best hope lies in incredulous experimenting with the mere machinery of my method. This may for a long time be timid and tentative—the mere insertion of an hour of partnership work in many hours of collective teaching. But the value of this will soon be apparent ; and I have hopes that these hours of individualized work will grow more and more numerous till at last the teacher takes what so many of us consider his rightful place—that of the self-effacing, sympathetic inspirer of the spontaneous work of his pupils.





## PART II

### THE PRACTICAL SOLUTION



## CHAPTER I

### BOYS IN PARTNERSHIP

I BELIEVE other teachers have set their boys to work in partnership.<sup>1</sup> There is no sovereign specific in this idea, which, although nobody had ever suggested it to me, seems in itself so simple as to be worth no serious claim to originality. Any two adults working at the same subject would naturally hit upon the device of reading together, and many boys have no doubt done so of their own free will.

The essence of my system is not that the boys work together in the ordinary sense of the word, but (*a*) that they are always studying different material, so that they may be mutually useful in their questioning; and (*b*) that the subject-matter is so contrived as to give constant scope to their activities. I contend that both of these two provisions are necessary ingredients in a system of this kind.

<sup>1</sup> Both Professor John Adams and Professor Culverwell have since reminded me of the system of *œmuli* among the pupils of the Jesuit schools. I rather think, however, that there was no differentiation of work—certainly I have never heard that there was, and the term *œmuli* suggests that there was not.

If the work done by the two partners were the same, there would be several obvious disadvantages. In the first place one of the two would nearly always be more advanced in his subject and would tend merely to lead his partner by the hand ; in the second place the useful stimulus of curiosity would be largely wanting (for under my system each partner has always the key to mysteries concealed from the other). This will be clearly seen if I give an example :

A (questioning B from "red" French conversation book) : *Comment vous appelez-vous ?*—B : *Je m'appelle. . . .*

B (questioning A from "blue" conversation book) : *Quel âge avez-vous ?*—A : *J'ai douze ans.*

If the second condition (scope for the partners' activities) were not fulfilled, we should find that the work could not long go on, inasmuch as external discipline would have to be invoked to keep the boys to their books, and this would be the prelude, first to reproof, then to nagging, and finally to disorder. It is best, therefore, so to arrange the work that from one-half to two-thirds of a given lesson consists of active questioning and answering (the answers being always under the eye of the questioner, so that he may check the responses of his co-worker). The following, for example, would be purely a game, although having every advantage of serious mental arithmetic. Disciplinary intervention would be absolutely uncalled-for.

Section I : What is one-eighth of £1 ?—Half a crown.



What is one-eighth of 20 shillings?—Half a crown. How many shillings in half a crown?—Two and a half. What is one-eighth of 20?—Two and a half. What is eight times two and a half?—Twenty. What is four times two and a half?—Ten. What is a quarter of ten?—Two and a half.

Section 2 : How many times is 3d. contained in one shilling?—Four times. How many times is 1½d. contained in one shilling?—Eight times. What is one-eighth of one shilling?—Three halfpence. What is one-eighth of twelve?—One and a half. What is eight times one and a half?—Twelve.<sup>1</sup>

Or, again, take the “missing word tests,” which are beloved of the boys, and do much to develop their powers of expression :

Section 1 : A man who seldom strikes out on a new line of action lacks (initiative). Mr. Lloyd George is the (Chancellor of the Exchequer). A man who does not eat meat or fish is a (vegetarian).

Section 2 : Carriages, bicycles and carts are (vehicles). He who makes his living by buying and selling stocks and shares for customers is a (stockbroker). A doctor who operates only is a (surgeon); a doctor who only prescribes medical treatment is a (physician).

(The boys usually supply the word “something” to indicate the bracketed word.)

In all of these cases the two essentials—activity and differentiation of work—are present; and one may reasonably expect to find intense application and a complete failure on the part of the boys to associate their happy activity with what they quite rightly hate and despise—that cold and uninspiring and artificial pro-

<sup>1</sup> This example is purely theoretical, as I have never taught mathematics on this, or any other system.

ceeding which they regard as "work." If a boy with such material as that suggested above remains sleepy and inactive, it will prove absolutely either (a) that any imaginable work has for him a deeply-ingrained unpleasant associations formed in earlier years, or (b) that he is in bad health. I find that six per cent. is the maximum number of boys who find a difficulty in applying themselves even to the most active kinds of work—and there is not one of these who does not show signs of progress towards a higher degree of concentration. Eventually, I am convinced, no boy would "slack" except through ill-health.

Here is a case of a boy who was quite incapable of applying himself under the collective system of teaching. Aged sixteen. Under the old system he entered the class slouchingly and with a look of good-humoured indifference. When examined he was worth rather less than ten per cent. Three weeks later extraordinarily keen work had brought him up, on another test paper, to a good thirty-five per cent. He now enters the class-room briskly, takes up his work at once, and applies himself to it enthusiastically for the full period. He no longer needs even encouragement, and is one of the best boys in the school.

I cite this case because it is one of several remarkable instances of the recovery of a boy, well on his way to manhood, from chronic failure to concentrate his mind on his work. The effect

of the system on younger boys is, on the average, and as one would expect, far more remarkable than on their seniors. My third form did splendidly from the very day on which I set them to do partnership work. Within a week they had reached what I considered the perfection of individual and collective enthusiasm. Form IV. was for a further week remarkably keen as judged by old-time standards, but still a little weak as compared with Form III. Then, quite suddenly, it reached the highest point of intense and continuous concentration. This phenomenon merits some detailed description.

It was a Saturday morning, and these boys were with me for a "double period" of ninety minutes. For seventy minutes they worked not only with intense zeal, but with the true game "intoxication." Not one of them, although all were overcoming incessant difficulties, seemed to realize that he was working at all. I was deeply moved, for this seemed to be the material proof that my theory was correct. I turned to them and asked them to stop. But they were deep in their work and did not hear me. By dint of nearly shouting I secured their attention, and told them that they had worked splendidly, and that if they liked a rest of three minutes they might have a quiet chat with one another for that time. I shall never forget their expression of boredom—in some faces, I am afraid, it was a look of irritation—when they heard what a silly

motive had prompted my interruption. In fewer seconds than it takes to write this sentence they were deep in their work again !

This little incident, surprising as I found it at the time, was merely a forerunner of a hundred such instances of joyous activity given to work which had hitherto proved a source—so far as a large portion of the class was concerned—of indifference or of painful application. Several times in a week the boys voted unanimously in favour of staying in for a quarter of an hour after school—and that without the slightest pressure on my part ; for I have ostentatiously withdrawn my right to punish, and each of my classes is now completely autonomous.

Neither must the reader run away with the impression that the work is specially recreational in its subject-matter. If I have (as any master ought to have) introduced pleasant dialogues for use in partnership, I found, in practice, just as good work done on French verbs, on syntactical exercises and on prose composition. *The work is only easier in the one sense that it gives scope to active treatment ;* it is innately neither more nor less difficult than the material used in collective teaching. The charge of “ making things easy ” is therefore no better founded than would be a similar charge brought against adult work which had been quickened by the evocation of a joyous activity. In practice no Government department would receive anything but praise were it to



arrange its routine in such a way as to develop at once the briskness and the happiness of its functionaries. And the grown-up man should be capable of finding his happiness in tasks accomplished with much more deliberation than is likely to appeal to the child !

What the boys learn under these conditions of responsible, self-sought work is, I am convinced, far more truly knowledge than are the facts gleaned from the discourse of a master. The truth is that even an adult learns relatively little from information which he has not been seeking. My younger boys cross-question me in French with a rapidity and a confidence and a zest that could only come if they were in touch with the very soul of the language. And a language is one of those things (failing incessant practice over many months) that only come to you when you have been carried into its depths by the fire of enthusiasm.

For the present no special books have been printed with a view to partnership work.<sup>1</sup> I hardly know whether this fact produces in me more joy or more regret. It produces joy in me because it brings me to reflect that if material so clumsy and inadequate can produce results of such promise after a relatively short period, what may we not expect with the use of ideal textbooks during six or seven years ? As things are, all that one can do, apart from pre-

<sup>1</sup> This statement has now to be amended, thanks to the enterprise of the publishers of the present book.

paring manuscript conversation books and other written matter, is to choose from the mass of school books those which are best adapted to rapid interrogation. To attain this end one has, of course, to pass by much that is admirable in the provision for the needs of collective teaching, in favour of often slightly inferior books responding better to the purpose of partnership teaching. Hence the regret.

My method of using printed books is to cut them up into sections and rebind them in paper covers. The labour of this proceeding is really formidable, though one eventually gets an accumulation of material that gives one a rest. The number of sections varies, and there is no reason why the whole of a class should be doing one particular kind of work at the same moment. But the total number of sections has to be very large, because in most cases a given textbook is of progressive difficulty, and it is frequently impossible to use more than the first two or three sections in one class. I have frequently the opening sections of half a dozen different books in use at one time.

Once the number of sectional books has become really large, it is easy to set every pupil in a school to do work exactly suited to his particular development. And here lies, I think, one of the greatest advantages of class-partnerships. There is no speed in mastering a subject equal to a speed arranged in accordance with one's own capacity.

All other means of fixing the rate of advance lead more often than not to the most deplorable intellectual wastage. The boy who is backward cannot profitably be driven on to a new stage before he is thoroughly at home on the level of his present attainments. It is merely repeating the process which has helped to make him backward. In point of fact I believe that eighty per cent. of boys in secondary schools would be better to be driven back instead of being driven forward. In two years the result would probably be surprisingly good. I have watched boys doing long multiplications before they were sure of the product of seven and six, doing long divisions before they were sure of the remainder in dividing fourteen by nine—and their teachers were men of long and honourable experience!

My system allows the slow worker to work slowly and the rapid worker to work rapidly. The average schoolmaster either will not or cannot vary his demands according to the pace of different individuals. Very few teachers, I am convinced, realize that in giving as homework ten sentences to put into Latin, they are often either giving a fine lesson in "scampering," or demanding of a boy a solid evening's drudgery on a single subject. If they could see, as I have had the chance of seeing, the despair to which this sometimes reduces a nervous and conscientious boy who dreads the reproaches or the punishments he knows so well will follow if he

does not somehow get through this monstrously mismeasured task, they would either vary their demands according to individual powers, or else seek safety in reducing it by one-half.

But can any solution be so satisfactory as to so interest the boys that they *must* do their best, and to accept then their efforts with sincere and visible pleasure, whether their tangible fruit be great or small? I think not. But it certainly demands a rare faith in a boy's own pride, in his honesty (when free from punishments), in his growing desire to develop and exercise his powers. I have convinced myself more deeply than I have ever convinced myself of anything that this optimistic view of the boy is profoundly true—that the view of him as naturally a “shirker,” a loafer, a fraud, is profoundly wrong. The worst of boys is, to me, better as a source of self-evolved activity than the best as seen by the schoolmaster of the old type. Indeed, once the fire of enthusiasm has been kindled it is not your Blifil but your Tom Jones who will work like a hero and develop endless devices for strengthening and testing his own powers. The “good” boy is sometimes out of his element when he finds that his master is resolved to be neither a bully nor a nursemaid. He soon proves to what shaky motives his goodness was due. He wants to be “told what to do,” while that “good-for-nothing slacker of a So-and-so” is showing him how to do great things without being told.



## CHAPTER II

### NEW SCOPE FOR INITIATIVE

UNDER collective teaching by a good master the only reason why initiative is not encouraged is because it cannot be—at least to anything like a proper extent. “Twenty boys twenty methods of work” at once conveys a truth and suggests the true ideal; but so long as boys are treated in herds, how is it possible for each to pursue the method of study to which he is best suited? One boy, like many men, learns better when the scope of the work is wide and generous (or even circuitous); another, like many other men, makes more progress when his subject-matter is concentrated, when its scope is narrow and restricted. To one boy mechanical aids are futile and meaningless; to another they are the first essential to his getting a quick grasp of his subject. To apply spontaneously principles that we feel to be right, oblivious to what others may think of them, is to show initiative; to tell us that not only must we not apply our principles, but that we have no right to believe in them, is to crush initiative before it is fairly born. Hence one of the gravest defects in existing education.

It does indeed want a certain faith in the instincts of childhood to believe, as I believe, that boys know best how to get their own knowledge. This must not, of course, be construed into meaning that a boy has nothing to learn about the proper method of his own work. I only urge that he already knows far more about it than the schoolmaster who, with a class of from fifteen to thirty individuals, can hardly discover and keep before him the lines of complex mental process which distinguish each particular boy. I do not expect, because it would not be fair to expect, that most people will accept this statement without justifying it by practical experiment themselves. But what I do ask them to remember, as a preliminary step to conviction, is that he who has never seen boys working with real scope for individual initiative, has not the right to say that their initiative will lead them along a less advantageous path than that of mere passive obedience. At the same time I, who have seen something of the effects of letting boys arrange the lines of their own mental and spiritual development, may perhaps be allowed to give here some of the results of my own experience.

Throughout my experiments I have been labouring under the very great disadvantage of having, so to say, to graft my way of teaching on to the collective system of education pursued by the other masters in the school. Thus two methods of instruction were liable to clash,

leaving the boys a little lost and confused by their alternation. But notwithstanding this difficulty, I think I shall be able to show sufficient evidence of the development of originality and of other higher qualities to suggest the need for a trial of this method on a far larger scale.

In the first place the progress of boys working in partnership depends to a greatly increased extent on what corresponds with a scientist's original research. At first the boy may not realize the inner change of attitude that this implies ; but presently he will notice that every bit of work suggests its " Why ? " or its " Because "—and his curiosity as well as his desire to explain will be correspondingly quickened. Points of syntax in the French sentence, for example, will come to him with all the force of unaided discovery. And this sense of discovery will add constant zest to his work. Taking French again, I have been astonished by the boys' delight in putting questions in that language to their master, as well as in answering them. This idea came spontaneously to one of the youngest of my beginners, and soon there was nothing he liked better than rapidly to point out the objects in the room, saying each time, "*Qu'est-ce que c'est que cela ?*" or to go through the movements of washing his hands, buttoning his coat or brushing his hair, while he asked me "*Qu'est-ce que je fais ?*" Gradually he widened the scope of his enquiries and all the time learned

new words and expressions, which he would ask me to write for him on the blackboard. This device was quickly adopted by the other boys in the form. I have also known pupils who hit on the idea of teaching one another to count in French by means of the centimetre rules, and others who strove desperately to write an original story in French.

A few weeks have sufficed in several cases to bring a thoroughly practical and *terre-à-terre* young "free scholar" to read to his partner passages from Shakespeare with the truest feeling and the proper dramatic expression; to write a story having claim to some real beauty and imagination; and to abandon a gruff and surly manner and develop a refreshingly natural and spontaneous politeness towards, and consideration for his master. It is indeed, as I have already hinted, precisely the unpromising material of traditional methods of teaching that shines out clear once one has accorded freedom to one's classes.

But whatever remarkable changes may be brought about under these restricted conditions, I am convinced that they are nothing compared with the possibilities suggested by the conception of a school that was completely free and self-governing. *What we need is not only freedom within the subject, but a large measure of freedom to choose between subjects.* This aim was foreshadowed as much as twelve years ago in



Mr. Harold Gorst's *The Curse of Education*—a book in which the author pointed with bitterness to the wastage of originality in making the same demands from every boy, without considering in any degree the important question of his personal preference.

If it is urged that it would be dangerous to leave a boy complete freedom of choice between the different subjects of a school curriculum, there is surely a far greater danger in leaving him no freedom at all. At the very least school subjects should be treated on the lines of allowing for each a *maximum* or a *minimum* number of hours, so that a boy loving history *per se* and hating geography *per se* should be able to do extra work at his history. It is frequently forgotten that a boy sometimes learns more of a hated subject through a close study of a subject for which he has a liking than by forcing himself to concentrate his mind on that which repels him. Later on, having (so to say) incidentally picked up the rudiments of the less attractive subject, he will be far more likely to pursue it to advantage if he is left to himself than if he is dragged through what are to him its meaningless *formulae*, before he is ready for their digestion. We have moreover to remember that if every boy had at least one "special" subject of study, two boys could never talk together without each teaching the other something.

Of course schools are very much fettered by the

demands of the universities, and we shall for some (I hope not for many) years to come be driven either (*a*) to make university subjects obligatory, leaving complete freedom of choice between all other subjects, or else (*b*) to allow a boy complete freedom of choice only until, say, the last two years before he reaches university age.

With regard to "local examinations," one can only say that this horrible weapon for killing all originality and invention in childhood is not only entitled to no consideration in this connection, but that there are a score of other reasons why it should be discountenanced by any one having the first instincts of the true teacher. Nothing is more extraordinary than the continued existence of the examination fetich in face of the condemnation it has received. That a bad servant should have been allowed to become a still worse master is one of the anomalies of recent educational history which I shall not stop to seek to explain.

While urging and praying for complete liberty for school-going children—a liberty that has succeeded beyond the wildest hopes with young criminals in the George Junior Republics and in the Little Commonwealth in Dorsetshire—one must admit that this is a counsel of perfection on which one has no right to insist in the present state of the educational world. All that one can claim as a first step is that boys and girls shall be allowed to work actively and in their

own way on subjects that may still have to be imposed upon them, but that are rendered more palatable by an increased scope, within them, for children's own initiative.

At the very least there must be an end of insisting that every child must work in one stereotyped way; it must no longer be a crime for a boy to rise and go quietly for a book in another part of a room without first asking the permission of the master: there must be no *minimum* limit set on the amount of preparation to be done. (For young boys five hours a day of intellectual work are fully enough, and seven hours very greatly too much.)

These are negative postulates. On the positive side "composition" must include an essay or a story or a dramatic scene at the boy's own choice; and he must be allowed not only to choose his subject but to treat it in his own way, secure from all really crushing criticism. My boys have advanced in freedom of style and grip of their subject in writing an essay far more through their excursions in the writing of fiction than they ever could have done had I kept them to the formal composition. The criticisms come best from the boys—the master being the watchful protector of the author against direct disparagement. His own remarks come last—when the boys have omitted to mention some serious defect of style or of development; and then they should be tempered constantly by that sincere

sympathy which any healthy-minded man may be expected to feel with purely creative work. The greater the mistake the less should be said of it—both on grounds of chivalry and of common-sense.

Neither does initiative begin and end with initiative in intellectual matters. Moral initiative is at least as important. And the gain is here even more marked than is the case with spontaneity in the process of learning. I could write endlessly of the effect on the boys' ethical sense of the granting to them of the full privileges of self-government. The greatest effects of self-government on the moral side, it must be remembered, are constant, whereas those on the intellectual side are merely very frequent. Then—this, I think, is an interesting point—fashion, which plays so large a part in a society of boys, soon reverses its ideals. It becomes the fashion to work and not to loaf. The boy who wants to loaf and not the boy who wants to work becomes the eccentric and the freak—so much so that such a boy has sometimes to be protected from the ridicule of his companions. Thus there is collective as well as individual initiative, and that altogether in a good and wholesome direction.

Recently, on the last day of term, my boys asked if they might have a class debate. Other subjects failing, we decided on the motion: "That boys govern themselves better than they



can be governed." Now I learned much from the arguments advanced. One boy, aged eleven, said: "When we started this system, there was still a little bullying in the school; now there is none." Others, taking up this cue, said how much better it now was for a boy who was "odd"; people got to know him better in class, and he became more popular. Lest there should be any doubt as to the value of this testimony let me hasten to add that not only had I never suggested this line of thought to my pupils, but that it was a consequence of partnership teaching upon which I had not counted.

But how does this touch the question of moral initiative? Very closely, I think; for it comes to mean that the boys no longer judged and condemned in herds, but were learning to form their own conclusions about their companions. And I hold that this is a result of far-reaching, of incalculable importance. Mr. Edmond Holmes has told us most eloquently of the likely social consequences of evolving a more highly socialized, more completely humanized type through freedom in our schools. There is nothing that makes me happier than the fact that I have caught a glimpse of a similar advance of type in actual progress towards realization. How could it be otherwise where a master shows constant sympathy with all—shows pity for the loafer and makes a rule of not seeing the peculiarities of the eccentric? And here I refer, of course, to the demeanour of eman-

cupatory directors in general, and not to any particular teacher. Soon, I hope from the bottom of my heart, the psychological cruelties (if I may use the expression) that still persist in schools—the cruelties that the boys borrow, though certainly with interest, from their masters, will follow physical cruelties, and belong to a barbarous past. But to those who hold, with all sincerity, that to evoke the initiative of boys is to evoke a thousand evil traits this line of reasoning will not commend itself. The repressionist will here call to his aid all his batteries of out-of-date theology, whole book-loads of Spartan maxims. It may sound impertinent, but I venture not to be dismayed, for we of the new school have something better to urge than the best and most cogent of theory; we have the fruits of actual experience.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FETICH OF THE ACADEMIC

I APPROACH now a chapter full of difficulty, for it is not always easy to find expression for even the most soundly based conclusions—and I have to go deep down in my own consciousness even to be sure of my ground. Roughly speaking the academic ideal of education is what we may describe as a geometrical ideal. It wants everything to be nicely rounded-off; it aims at plotting out the field of knowledge into neat compartments, which are to be explored one by one, and in one particular way. It pretends to measure results quantitatively, and demands that every step in the educational process shall be taken with a view to this quantitative estimate. Hence “boys” must be expected to construe so many lines of Caesar, to put so many sentences illustrating a particular rule into French; to learn arithmetic in one fixed order of “rules.” The academic schoolmaster would no more allow a boy to stray from the path of knowledge laid out for him than he would give him *carte blanche* to go alone to London or Paris.

Now it is only a very special and not generally an intellectually superior type of adult that is adapted to a very cramped and inelastic way of working. Most of us prefer to skip certain parts even of the most authoritative works, and to make good what we have skipped by reading another book. If we did not do so we should not, generally speaking, have gained, since absolute perfection of memorizing (other than that of a purely mechanical kind) is unattainable, and that which is retained depends on a selective process which varies infinitely according to the degree of our interest and the strength of our tendency to form the requisite associations.

With children engaged in reading that which they have no special and personal desire to read, the proportion of what is mentally dissected and remembered in any useful form is enormously less than even that which is remembered by an adult under similar circumstances. Thus the idea that children in masses can be made to master books in a certain fixed way is based on the conception of a narrow perfectibility of brain which is impossible of realization either in the child or the adult. If children's mental processes throughout their studies were of that order, they might prove themselves to be very good machines, but they would not represent a very high type of intelligent human being. Preference and selectiveness in the exercise of intellectual process mark a superiority and not an inferiority of



type. Hence to lay down the law for each detail of study is to offer a premium to mediocrity.

Now all this has a very direct application to our present purpose. We must first prove that children do not tend to swallow these exact doses of learning with the same academic regularity as that with which they are presented to them. To have toiled through a particular book could be justified in some measure if even half a form had mastered thoroughly the greater part of its contents; but if, as so often happens, this narrow method of study leads to general disgust and the acquiring of a singularly meagre stock of mere information—then one begins to ask if the academic method of study is so unavoidable as it is generally supposed to be. And if, as I maintain, it *nearly always* leaves a child destitute of all understanding of the inner spirit of what he is working upon—then one comes within measurable distance of actually framing an indictment. Far from framing it, however, I am going to leave the responsibility of attack with the forces of the old order, and shall here only try to show that in a great part of the work of the school there is far less need for rigid lines of method than is generally supposed—which, of course, is a very different thing from saying that no method is required.

Let us take the ordinary “first” French book, We strike at once against countless instances of the academic fetich. Frequently a boy has worked

for a good part of the year without ever having had occasion to use a past tense—although practically all the interest in using a language arises precisely from being able to relate or hear things related that have actually taken place. The theory, I need hardly point out, is that “boys must know their present tenses before they know their pasts.” That the exact contrary would be rather more true, it would only want a moment’s thought to make clear. The study of no subject should rely on dullness for its first principle: and what could be duller than endless pages about cornfields, the relationships of imaginary people and lifeless descriptions of scenes in an imaginary village? Hardly even those ancient dialogues about “my uncle’s walking-stick,” and “your brother’s penwiper”!

If, on the other hand, the boy can make sentences, as my boys have after two or three lessons, about what they have seen or done, their subject fascinates them from the outset. I have myself had occasion to study to some extent about six of the principal European languages; and in all I naturally inclined, I remember, to work on the perfect tense before I troubled about the present, simply because the perfect tense had life and interest in it, while the present, apart from scientific or philosophic reading, of which I was then incapable, was relatively tame and uninspiring. Even a child who can say: “*J’ai la plume,*” can also say “*J’ai vu*

*M. Jones*”—and how infinitely more interesting it is to say it.

The fetich leads the enemy to dilate to us upon the importance of “knowing one thing thoroughly,” and to ask us to try to pile up in our pupils’ minds an immense vocabulary of nouns, adjectives, pronouns and adverbs on the mean foundation of a single tense. (With truly wonderful inconsistency he is asking two or three years later for almost unusable tenses of obsolescent verbs !)

The same thing in history. All the life-blood is almost deliberately drained-off, and the master feeds with well-feigned greed on his pupils’ definitions of “scutage” and “Danegeld.” The exact terms of a treaty—learned only to be forgotten—are welcomed more eagerly than the vital facts in the evolution of liberty, in the social life of the people, in the growth of industries.

All this arises from the absurd notion that everybody ought to know everything. No matter how clear a view a boy may wish to have of the rise of Napoleon, he is to be better employed in cramming the Constitutions of Clarendon ! In point of fact, if his view of the rise of Napoleon were really clear and sound, his knowledge of general history would be *ipso facto* fuller than that of the average educated citizen ; whereas if he knew well three different periods of thirty years each (with the gaps left quite empty), he would have a better appreciation of the spirit of history

than most boys are ever likely to get. This does not amount to urging that boys should necessarily specialize in periods of history; it means only that this pursuit of the academically perfect inevitably defeats its own ends and leads to wastage where it aims at economy.

One reason why I have given so much space to this aspect of current education is that I have to pave the way to the wholly heterodox procedure which I have followed with my own boys. I have felt from first to last that the boy must be his own book—that he must seek his own information, absorb it and reproduce it in his own way. There is no royal road to the mastery of any one subject, and a fact which would have a profound effect on one boy at a given moment leaves another quite indifferent until his moment of responsiveness arises. But each pupil, if he works with free activity, can find endless material to which he *can* be almost incessantly responsive, so that the intellectual wastage is reduced to the lowest possible *minimum*, and the boy is always progressing towards a higher plane of intelligent appreciation of his subjects.

Hence those who follow the partnership plan of teaching will not content themselves with the meagre resources of the old school of teachers. And the fact that even beautiful editions of books can be cut up into sections at a fairly small cost per head and lent to the boys will help to enlarge the range of material brought into



play. "Geography" will include travel books; "History" will draw on biographies and on richly-illustrated editions of the great historians; "Science" will be enriched from the almost endless resources of modern publishing-houses; modern languages will be taught as the expression, not of one author's thoughts, but of many-sided life, revealed in books of the most varied kinds, gradually unfolding their meaning through a study based rather on natural logic than on artificial laws.

Work in partnership makes this mode of study not only possible, but inevitable. The school will be its own little world, reflecting in miniature all the interests of the greater world outside. Thanks to their activity the boys of the new order will mount joyously from height to height in their upward climb. That they will not follow the same path is not, I think, a matter for regret. To me it is a matter for thanksgiving, firstly because we shall thus have the first human beings who all through their lives have, so to say, personalized knowledge; and secondly we shall have men and women who have learned the sweetness of voluntary and devoted effort.

Then we shall hear less of "subjects" and see more of a proper synthesis of intellectual interests. New things that are not "subjects" will be taught; the boy will for the first time have some thoughts about civic principles; he will have more scientific ideas about health and disease;

he will have a notion of æsthetics and of experimental psychology ; he will know in what books to look for any information he may require ; he will have passed through his school days afraid of no book—because he has never been forced to read one against his will—and end by loving books in general because from first to last they have been in his mind associated with his own joyous activity.

In some schools "General Knowledge" is taught as a "subject." I cut up for my boys *The Parent's Book* and Nuttall's *Encyclopædia*. Humble enough material, in good sooth. But what a joy they were ! The unflagging enthusiasm with which my pupils questioned one another set me thinking of the great days that are coming, when every boy will be able to satisfy that yearning for knowledge which is his constant possession—till the traditional school has taught him never to say "Why?" again. Most boys have in them much of the born scientist. And it will be a great day for the world when this yearning for a knowledge of laws and principles has full scope.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE NEW SCHOOLMASTER

THE new order of schoolmaster will not, strictly speaking, be new at all. He has existed in all ages, but he has always been rare. He will soon be commoner, because more may depend in these matters on a hint from changed conditions than most people are apt to suppose. Many repressionists repress because they have never heard it seriously said that boys are not the better for being repressed. Others repress because it is easier to do so than to be constantly finding scope for their pupils' activity. Many of the first class will be slowly converted by the lessons of Montessori and of the Little Commonwealth; the second will be won over when plenty of material is to hand for the use of their pupils.

The qualities to be possessed by the new schoolmaster at his best are not difficult to sum up. He will be at once the modest, patient, scientific observer and the sympathetic friend of his pupils; he will know how to be silent when there is no need to speak; he will be a natural (never a hypocritical) diplomat, with an instinct for saying

with sincerity that which is psychologically apt ; he will be profoundly an optimist with regard to individuals and to the mass ; from the goodness of his heart he will make each boy feel that no boy is more honoured nor more trusted than the boy before him.

These are general requirements—for all that is mere “ method ” can be learned easily enough. Now are such men common ? Certainly not at present. Will they become common ? If the best of the new type will, as I think, always show a clearer lead over their fellows than did the best schoolmaster of the old order over his, still I feel that there are a very large number of good men ready to do fair justice to that rather formidable list of requirements. And, after all, the risks of utter failure in conducting a class provided with material enabling it to work actively are much less than in conducting a class under conditions of unnatural silence and inertness.

Of all the qualifications I have mentioned none, I think, is more important than what I have described as “ modesty.” By this I mean scientific modesty, a sort of agnosticism with regard to the appropriate didactic method to be applied to each individual, a tendency to wait and to watch. The new psychology has little to say about “ boys.” Its business is with units, and it is ever willing that the unit should put it to school again. My ideal master will trust



himself to act on no generality that cannot be made on what he sees before him at the moment. He will claim no superiority, so that his evident superiority of experience and of mechanical efficiency may have their due and natural weight. His politeness and consideration will be unfailing (I believe that, short of a violent exaggeration which might suggest irony, courtesy to boys cannot be overdone); he will be unceasing in his search for what has been better done, and of that which has been badly done he will say little, and that with a friendly smile; he will be frank and communicative without "making himself too cheap"; he will be (in a good and holy sense) the servant and not the master, and so increase his boys' respect a hundredfold.

At the risk of bringing myself under the ban of my own condemnation of generalities, I cannot help insisting on the almost unobserved paradoxes of the healthy boy's nature. Short of the pedagogic "holy terror" (if signs of fear are to be taken into account), no master gains much true respect from his boys unless his claims are reduced to a minimum. Initiative in conduct has the same value as initiative of the intellectual kind, and the perfectly natural boy respects first the man whom he chooses to, and not the man he is told to respect. Hence, I say, short of a demeanour which a boy might dub "wormishness," the less a master claims for himself in a class of free boys the more he is certain to get

I have said elsewhere that the spirit we shall want in our newest teachers ought to be something between the spirit of the referee at a football match and that of an enthusiastic spectator. All must be keen, all must be positive. No reproaches, no talk of punishments—or all may collapse like a house of cards. “I think it would be good fun to do this” is a frequent prelude of mine, and it very rarely excites anything but an enthusiastic response. We must learn to respect every child—to watch sympathetically and only to inhibit after due and imaginative reflection. Every child works and should work in a different way—and don’t let us even suggest our way of doing things until we are quite certain that the child’s is not, for him, the better and the more profitable. In the early stages of my experiment I interfered with different methods of work far more than I do now. I thought some questions too easy—but how often I have found my mistake, and that the natural genius of the child was superior to all conventional calculation!

I have dealt already with the relative effacement of the teacher in this system as compared with collective instruction. Our *rôle* will be to pass from child to child, encouraging, suggesting new ideas, correcting pronunciation, and last but not least circulating the new ideas we gain from our pupils—for these are often full of ingenuity and, above all, of psychological fit-

ness. Montessori, after many years of scientific study of conventional and unconventional child psychology, has boldly stated that there can be no such thing in practice. The only person who understands a child is another child. And every day I am proving the truth of her contention, and every day my boys are teaching me more than ever I could teach them.

Then one must not be timid about the according of a full measure of freedom. On one occasion, when my third form was flooded with new boys, I told them in the most deliberate tone that there was "no possible hope of getting a punishment," and I never knew the sternest of actual punishments produce a more healthy or a more lasting effect. This is the form in which in two terms I have not had a single boy who did not work with real enthusiasm for nine-tenths of his time. There is something challenging in a strong and vigorous declaration of this perfect immunity from external pressure, but when all is said I am too much of an educational agnostic to seek to explain the phenomenon in terms of everyday psychology. But one thing is quite certain—that the same words could not have the same effect on a class doomed to sit silent while the master talked.

One remark made by a little fellow of twelve in this same third form has its interest in the present context. After a burst of excitement over some new development of my partnership

system, I reminded my boys that while *they* might believe, it would not be so easy to convince outsiders. The little boy of whom I write looked at me with an expression of extraordinary understanding, and said: "YOU MUST WAIT FOR US, SIR."

The significance of this saying (which opponents, through their "knowledge of boys," may easily translate into an example of my exceeding credulity) lies in the fact that it coincides with the view several times expressed or implied by Mr. Edmond Holmes, that the hope of a supply of Montessori-inspired teachers lies in the pupils of existing schools of liberty and enlightenment. But who would have expected the perception of this possibility to come from one of the youngest of those very pupils?

If it were a matter of replacing every repressionist by teachers resolved to give a maximum of liberty to their pupils, we should indeed have to wait for many years before any marked effect had been made on the untroubled, if muddy, waters of English education. But fortunately for my peace of mind, if not for my value as a statistician, I believe that quite one-third of existing teachers, and quite possibly a good many more, are beyond hope neither of conviction nor of making the experiment of leaving much more to the initiative of their pupils than they are prepared to do at the present time. I have known one case at least of a master of an exag-



geratedly repressive order who, in a few months, through his having been convinced of the truth of Montessori's contentions, has emerged as the gentlest and most considerate of pedagogues. Is it beyond hope of realization that such radical changes of outlook should be frequent? After all it must not be supposed that the average repressionist is what he is necessarily either from laziness or liver or lack of heart. Most frequently, in all probability, he is so because it is the correct and traditional thing to be, and because he has never seen any serious reason to be anything else.

Whatever effect emancipationist theories may have upon the present generation of teachers, one thing is certain: they are going to attract into our ranks a new and more original type of schoolmaster. To sensitive men—and they are just the people we want under the new *régime*—there has been much that was repugnant under the old class-teaching. The rough-and-ready justice, the need to harden one's heart when one felt most pity, the application of trivial and vexatious rules, the effort to produce a uniform type in a world already so dreadfully uniform—all these things, on top of the petty irritations of the ordinary schoolmaster's life, have served to make our calling one of the least attractive to those born with what has hitherto been the curse of a delicate sympathy and a rich imagination. The new school might very well be a

perpetual delight to such a man. His work will at every moment be creative; there will be a fine field for his sympathies; he will be immune from all danger of committing the once inevitable injustice. He will have before him a little world growing all the time with the wonderful growth that can be seen only when spontaneity has full play. It will be a life full of richness and beauty and endless charm for the true artist; of constant and fascinating and endlessly changing problems for the man of science. In a world of true thinkers such a prospect would be singularly alluring, and even in this commercialized world I have hopes that it will not be without its attraction. Nearly all the spheres of work which offer the chance of creation or of research have been filled for the most part by men who were prepared to sacrifice their material interests to the passion of their intellectual life. Teaching may yet be another.

But even on the material side I know of no way in which the public is more likely to be converted to a true appreciation of the teacher's mission than in the coming effort to revitalize the whole structure of society through its children. Mention education now, and even the father or the mother will suppress a yawn. The day is fast approaching when it will be recognized that the highest human function is the art of training the young through their own activities.

## CHAPTER V

### SHOULD PARTNERSHIP TEACHING BE EXCLUSIVE ?

WE shall have to wait for a long and varied series of experiments before we are able to say with confidence that work in partnership is to occupy this or that particular proportion of the manifestation of boys' activities. All I can say at present is that partnership teaching and the dramatic method are the only really promising outlets for the natural energies of children in the schoolroom that I am aware of—and that the dramatic method, excellent as it is under ideal conditions, has certain obvious disadvantages to which I have already referred. The whole of the teaching of languages, ancient or modern, could, I feel certain, be carried out by pupils working in partnership ; and at the least a very large portion of the work on history, geography, English literature, chemistry, shorthand and general knowledge could be studied in this way.

Mathematics offer a very special problem, as to which I am in the unfortunate position of having no right to an opinion owing to my own incapacity in this direction. Those whom I

have consulted vary in their view from a confident assertion that "it is the most suitable subject of all" to the expression of a grave doubt whether it would not have to be left to its present devices. (This last, by the way, is by no means the inevitable alternative, since it happens, on the showing of other experiments, to be a subject in which fine results have been achieved by a strict individualization of work, allowing each boy to maintain his own pace.) One most capable mathematician has promised me to experiment, in a well-known boarding-school, on lines which he thinks would render the application of the partnership principle certain of success. I should be most grateful for any hints on this particular field of investigation.

Whether we have or have not to make exceptions to the general principle of teaching in this way, I think we can take for granted that it may well become the *chief* means of giving scope to the boys' spontaneous effort. But to say this is not to imply that we need be too bigoted in our heresy and exclude, for example, the purely individual work that boys might be encouraged to carry out in their school library, or to deny the value of an occasional lecture by a master. To do so would be to adopt the very methods of exclusive intolerance which we have had occasion to regret in our opponents. The idea of setting boys to teach one another from material placed before them by the master must, in any event,



evolve. It cannot come in a day, because we have first to provide and set up the machinery necessary to the working of the method. All that really matters at this juncture is the securing of a large number of masters resolved to end, as soon as this proves possible, the practice of teaching boys in a mass at one fixed pace, and to substitute for it a policy based on the taste, the capacity and the rate of progress of the individual boy.

Madame Montessori has over and over again, but not once too often, emphasized the danger of confounding the new ideal of education with the mechanical use of this or that piece of didactic apparatus, and the same warning has to be repeated with any fresh effort to provide for the free activities of children. It is in this reference that it is true that sound educational theory is often more practical than practice itself. The incredulous master—the master who still believes that repression is a necessary basis of the training of children—would do well, therefore, to limit, at first, the application of the partnership method to a very small area in the field of his activities. Within this area he will, of course, “play the game” to the extent of according the fullest possible liberties, and of effacing his own authority to the utmost possible degree. He must remember that no didactic theory can stand the test, in its application, of even a subconscious intention to let it end in a *reductio ad absurdum*. To

educate without enthusiasm is not to educate at all; but to educate without the least presumption that the method you are applying has some soundness in it can only produce complete disaster. I have no fear either of the true enthusiast, nor of the impartial and serious experimenter, but one cannot shut one's eyes to the danger of experiments rendered bad by the fact that they are something worse than half-hearted.

The policy of "the thin end of the wedge" is then, I fancy, the best upon which we can discreetly enter in the present state of the educational world. From that will come the general perception of new psychological truths which are infinitely more important than any application of them in the practical administration of the school. All roads having the direction of free activity lead at last to the goal of self-government, and it is the sense of direction which we need to cultivate first in the teacher of the new era.

With actual teaching through partnerships certain individualizing methods of imparting instruction are directly parallel. Such are, for example, my French game of "Solitaire," in which in his home-work a boy, by means of "stage directions" in English, teaches himself all the commoner expressions<sup>1</sup> connected with

<sup>1</sup> e.g. "You are going to wash your hands: *Je vais me laver les mains.* (Taking the soap) *Je prends le savon.*

his daily life ; guessing games<sup>2</sup> involving tests of his efficiency in vocabulary, and class debates. In fact the advocate of teaching in partnership could be opposed to no other form of evocation of the boys' own will to do good and cheerful work. It will be found, moreover, that once the boys have found an outlet for their own activities of the co-operative kind, they will be far better prepared to do good work entirely by themselves than if they had had whole hours of continuous impassivity in class.

On certain sides of the teaching of particular subjects the partnership method has a special significance. Such, for example, is the conversational treatment of Latin. Whether this is

*Qu'est-ce que je prends ? Je prends le savon.* (Dipping hands and soap in water) *Je plonge les mains et le savon dans l'eau,*" etc. After the various actions of washing and drying the hands have been completed, the boy questions himself in the past tense, beginning with *Qu'est-ce que j'ai fait d'abord ?* If a boy has a railway passing at the bottom of his garden I provide for him meditations in dialogue form concerning the passing of a train. Another boy I send in his leisure time to the station with appropriate sentences ready-made, so that he learns to associate the language of particular actions with the actions themselves.

<sup>2</sup> The guessing game was used with much success in the teaching of Latin as far back as the eighteenth century. With little boys it will serve to strengthen the vocabulary of available nouns ; with older boys I go through a series of actions and get them to guess which of them it is of which I am thinking, e.g., *Qu'est-ce que j'ai fait ? Vous avez montré le plafond—vous vous êtes lavé les mains—vous avez mis le livre sur le pupitre,* etc.

going to be the future method of teaching the dead languages *par excellence*, or whether it is only going to be a minor help to that end, Latin conversation in partnership has obviously the greatest possible advantage over similar conversation taught collectively. And whatever one may think of the future of co-operative work in mathematics, it is certain that dual work on mental arithmetic would provide a better basis for the firm and easy handling of numbers than anything of which I, at any rate, am aware. It must be remembered that if boys are provided with my material for mutual questioning (the answer, of course, always following the question), and catechise their partners for the space of a quarter of an hour, they have at the end of that time covered, in a class of average size, the equivalent of some five hours' work as under the system of collective teaching.

The library might be made a centre of intellectual activity such as it has never been made hitherto. Indeed it might become the true centre of all intellectual activities. Not only might the boys seek in it literary and scientific knowledge, but it could form the strongest link between books and life by including, besides the greatest and the best achievements of the human intellect, works of practical import—on gardening and carpentry, for example—which would form the basis of corresponding manual activities, and so train the boys to go to books for informa-



tion of every possible kind. Seeing the average citizen's bigoted separation of "theory" and "practice," the gain through this proceeding would be extremely great. The library would form, again, the proper centre for seeking information for the English composition, for the historical story, for the play, for the debate. Such a state of things might prevail even under present conditions; but with the new encouragement of the boys' own initiative it would have a new meaning and an enormously increased value.

In laying down any laws as to what the boy should be asked to learn, the disciple of the new school of thought will show an inevitable reserve based on his faith in the boy himself, and on the surprises that he must needs count upon in the directions taken by the interests of those who have been emancipated from the excesses of outside control. Once the creative instincts of the young have been revitalized, a hundred new avenues of learning will be opened to us. And so many new "methods" will be invented by the greatest of all educational reformers—the pupils themselves—that it would be an impertinence on my part to lay down laws in which they might see nothing but psychological ineptitude.

What right, then, have I to lay down even the principle that the class partnership is to be our first and greatest resource in providing for the intellectual energies of our boys? In the first

place I have seen it in working order, and I have seen no single boy to whom it seemed unsuited ; in the second place it is so simple in conception that if a test with seventy boys is considered insufficient, I urge that its very inevitableness would commend it to any boy at the very first moment of its application. The partnership represents the natural arrangement of the two sides of a game—reflects a principle that a boy would invent himself if it were not ready to his hand. Indeed I believe that it is only by dint of looking at things through the eyes of the child, and not through any elaborate deductions, that I have arrived at this most unassuming of devices for leading boys to regard their work as play. And that is the best thing that I could ask of those who are prepared to work this method as an experiment—that they will do all in their power to gain something of a child's faith in the simple but wonderful vision of the children about them !

## CHAPTER VI

### THE DIFFERENTIAL IDEA

IN the middle of last summer I published, as a *ballon d'essai*, a brief and too hastily written pamphlet, entitled "Differentialism: A New Method of Class Teaching." Despite its rapid treatment of a very large subject this booklet aroused much more interest than I had dared to anticipate. But much in it was necessarily vague and indefinite. And there are many misconceptions about this particular side of my theory that are still in need of correction.

The way it arose was this. I was standing before my class one day, wondering what verb I should give the boys to learn, when it came into my mind to ask myself why I gave one verb to a whole class, and whether there was any well-founded reason why masters gave twenty boys one particular thing to learn at one particular moment. Needless to say I found it very difficult to give myself any valid reason for this proceeding, and I at once decided to try the effect of giving as many verbs as there were boys. The result, as I had half foreseen, was

remarkable. The bottom boys in the form, spurred to effort by the fact that for the first time they knew things of which their class superiors were ignorant, at once showed an interest in their work such as they had never displayed before (for these were pre-partnership days). After that, and so long as I taught collectively, I set my work on this principle of letting one boy teach another through being in possession of different information; and when I reached the partnership stage of my experiments I saw no reason to depart from this plan.

I am convinced still that partially differentiated work is a necessity for work in partnership, but I have come to see that complete differentiation to the extent of giving every boy different work from that of any other boy is less necessary than was the case in collective teaching. By this I mean that *so far as the actual working of the partnerships is concerned* there is no great advantage in providing twenty different sections of books over providing two sets of ten, so that the two boys working together may have different material, enabling them to be mutually useful. But I think it would certainly be of the greatest possible advantage, from the point of view of general culture, that the boys should be able to exchange ideas taken from the widest possible range of sources.

Another advantage, where existing printed books are used, is that this proceeding results in



an immense economy—since it enables, as I have stated elsewhere, a single copy of a valuable book to be read simultaneously by many boys. Where manuscript books have to be made, the best method is, I think, to compromise and take from four to six copies of each section. Boy A may then be questioning his partner B on the futures of French irregular verbs, while B is interrogating A on the corresponding past participles. C, E and G may then have the same matter before them as A, and D, F and H may have a provision similar to that of B, but the rest of the class may be quite differently occupied. And the fact that the boys are offered all possible choice of material certainly tends to add to their enthusiasm for their work.

In English and in a school that is perfectly free of all “set-books” it would be a clear advantage to reverse the process I have just mentioned and encourage differentiation in reading *except as between the partners*, who in the reading aloud would take it in turn to read to one another. The fact that ten different English classics were being read in a class of twenty boys at one moment would certainly encourage a very healthy exchanging of notes and would indirectly help considerably the boys’ powers of expression. I know well that it will be a matter of much difficulty to get the vast majority of masters to see eye to eye with me in this matter of letting relatively so much work pass without the most

vigilant enquiry into the detail of what is being done. And so long as they look at the problem from the one angle there is little hope of their conversion. For we are suddenly in the very depths of genuine Montessori theory.

I have never felt a greater sense of responsibility than I feel at this moment. For people so often forget that good grounds for a belief may meet with such a bad exposition that it is all as if those grounds were bad. In the first place to any one of the new school the question is on all fours with the problem of allowing a child to dress itself twelve months before most children are allowed to do so. It is only the Montessori mother who could never hesitate, because she would know that even if the child's efforts to dress itself are at first clumsy and grotesque, its very blundering is more educative than the most finished exposition of dressing at the hands of its mother.

Then our critics have to remember that it is the schoolboy and not the boy who is careless of the mistakes he makes. Let me remind you once more of that Montessori child who rubbed out a beautifully-made letter *seven times* that he might make it still more beautiful. Lastly, nurse a boy and he will go on being nursed. Every day that you make him dependent on you for the care and accuracy of his work will be a day that renders him more incapable of self-criticism. The best avenue to self-criticism is

that of self-discovered mistakes, otherwise the perpetual faultfinder would be the best, and not, as even the most conservative of theorists would admit, the worst of teachers.

Of course if any subject is to be learned thoroughly there must be adequate provision for, so to say, an attack upon it from many points. And this is a particular in which this system has a clear advantage over collective teaching. Its elasticity provides the possibility of supplying at any moment the material for correcting any defect found in a particular individual. If a boy is weak on a syntactical construction in a foreign language, we can at once provide him with the section of a full treatise that he requires; if he thinks that a moujik is an animal of the mongoose tribe, what better moment for him to learn, without keeping back a whole class, something of life in Russia from the sectional library? *With this system the material for self-correction is constantly at hand.*

The principal of differentiation, even in the respect where it might at first seem to be weakest, may well be regarded as a source of strength, inasmuch as it throws the onus of government on the boys themselves. The master *has to* trust the boys; if they were all doing the same work (which on quite other grounds would be impracticable) the principle of self-government would have no real scope for development, since it would be too easy and too tempting to the

master, from force of habit, to take complete command. To those who are not anxious to extend this new franchise to boys, this will hardly be considered a point in favour of the partnership principle. But it will be the greatest of all consolations to the master of the new school and to many a parent who has seen the coming of the dawn in education.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE MATERIAL FOR PARTNERSHIP WORK

I HOPE we shall soon have a considerable amount of printed matter for use under the partnership plan. Meantime the master who wishes to experiment can begin by making his own printed and manuscript sectional books. The possible variety of this material is practically infinite. It is impossible to have too many sections on hand, because some point of delicate adjustment to individual needs is constantly needing attention.

In French, those who wish to begin in a very cautious way may very well cut up Hachette's or Macmillan's full French verb books into the requisite number of sections. The simplest way to treat the pages after their removal from the parent book is to take first a doubled piece of kitchen paper a little larger than the requisite size, so as to allow of subsequent cutting, and pass the seccotine tube down it in such a way as to deposit a continuous streak of glue just wide enough to cover the back and half the margin on each side of the batch of leaves. The final

cover may be of thick brown paper applied in the same manner. This should be labelled with the name of the book and the number of the section. . . . Next, if it has been realized through this simple test that even relatively dull material can lead to keen work, the master may make a few class dialogues on my system of giving "stage" directions in the margin of the page. The French tenses may be specially studied on the same principle—one or two cards being devoted to each tense. I will give, by way of example, a sentence or two of typical conversational exercises on the past participle. The participles of practically all the commoner French irregular verbs can be introduced on this plan :

Partner (having placed book on table) : *Qu'est-ce que j'ai fait ? Vous avez MIS le livre sur la table.* (Having opened the book) : *Qu'est-ce que j'ai fait ? Vous avez OUVERT le livre.* (Having read) : *Est-ce que j'ai LU quelque chose ? Oui, vous avez LU quelque chose.* (Having written in his exercise-book) : *Qu'est-ce que j'ai fait ? Vous avez ÉCRIT dans votre cahier.*

The time can be taught by watches or by clock faces together with time-cards on something like the following principle :

Question : *Quelle heure est-il ?*

Partner sets watch to :—

9 o'clock.—*Il est neuf heures.*

11.30 o'clock.—*Il est onze heures et demie.*

4.20 o'clock.—*Il est quatre heures vingt, etc.*

Activity may be introduced into the reading side of the work by what I may call the intensive study of texts. The principle is much that

followed in an admirable book called *Textes et Questions*, except that I give preliminary exercises in vocabulary, and naturally add, in the dialogue which succeeds the text, the full answer as a check on the reply of the partner. And there is practically no limit to the provisions that may be made for the study of modern languages on the partnership plan.

Both for French and English I strongly recommend the "missing word game" (or "missing word tests" as the conventional master would perhaps prefer to have it). In French we might have, in order to exercise the pupil on the pronouns: *La maison (dont) je parle*; in English; in the first case as vocabulary drill, and in the second as a matter of general knowledge, we might have: (a) *Glue, honey and treacle are (viscous) substances*; (b) "*Utopia*" was written by (Sir Thomas More). The imaginative master will see that even this little device suggests the possibility of an almost indefinite development. Indeed quite a considerable amount of special as well as of general knowledge might be acquired by this means. And where it is applicable it has the advantage of not even wasting the time necessary to the framing of an appropriate question.

Of the consequences of giving boys thorough partnership drill in mental arithmetic, I could not say quite all I anticipate, because I should seem to many to be exaggerating. But let me remind them of the immense economy of time,

of the encouraging effect on boys who have no leaning towards figures, and of the value in this and kindred subjects of boys being able to master one principle before passing on to the next—and, even if they do not accept the full measure of my optimism, I believe they will agree “that there is something in it.” If we did not create in the very young boy a greatly increased sense of number we should at the very least add considerably to his ability to handle figures in later youth and throughout his manhood. Exactly what would be the lines along which we should adapt partnership methods to the more advanced problems of arithmetic and of algebra I can only repeat that my ignorance of mathematics must needs hinder me from any clear and definitive statement ; but it does seem to me that a method which only demands for its success the providing of material giving scope for full personal activity and the supplying of the solution of every problem which the boy has to propound to his partner must be capable of adaptation to the teaching of most, if not all, of the branches of mathematics.

Such important educational details as spelling would be especially provided for. In fact spelling is a subject in which work in partnership finds one of its greatest sources of justification. I do something in this direction with the sectional dictionary, but I also do much for the training of the observation, by encouraging the boys to give one another time-tests, in which one boy



allows his partner a certain number of seconds to look at a word—real or “nonsense”—which involves more or less prolonged and accurate study before it is possible to reproduce it correctly.

But there is one thing that the more impatient of my critics must bear in mind—that whatever be the merits or the defects of the partnership method as a provision for the innumerable requirements of modern education, it is not for one man to offer a ready-made programme claimed to be applicable to every side of the work of the class-room. I only claim, given a large number of true enthusiasts working along these lines, and patiently evolving ever newer ways of employing the principle laid down, that we are on the eve of solving the problem of adapting school work to every conceivable need of the individual. But such a result cannot be attained in a day. There is nothing harder than to induce men accustomed all their lives to the idea that “boys are to be seen and not heard,” that “idle boys must be punished,” and that to “spare the rod is to spoil the child,” even to believe that one’s theories are not of the evil one, let alone to add to their own work (for the moment at any rate) by starting on what they might conceive to be a very useless series of experiments. Indeed such men are probably beyond hope of conversion. On the whole it is wiser not to try to convert them, but to apply

all one's energies to winning over those who are already ripe for conviction

If it were hopeless to expect that a fair proportion of schoolmasters would approach this method of teaching with an open mind, and in the event of their being convinced would make some small personal effort to test its principles in practice, this book would not have been written. And whatever may be said about the "conservatism" of the pedagogue, I do believe that, scattered over these isles, in the Empire beyond and in America, there are men of fire and energy, men of science, men of reason, who have long groaned over the lifelessness, the cruel rigidity, the hopelessness of repressive education. What is more, I believe that not a few of them are doing far more than the letter of the law of their employment dictates to them to do, in their sincere efforts to make the best possible use of what they know to be a bad and worn-out machine. It is on such men as these that I depend for the fair and exhaustive trial of the idea with which I set out in this volume, and it is to them that I now appeal.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SOME HINTS ON DISCIPLINE

FEW people who have not given the matter special thought are likely to have realized that to accord liberty to children is not merely to withdraw interference, but to *encourage them to be free*. It is quite amusing to notice how many people there are, from school inspectors downwards, who cannot understand this little point. As I pointed out in the first part of this book, a child may be free in a spatial sense—in the sense of mere capacity to move among grown-up people—without either being truly free, or, what is more, enjoying the vestige of a feeling of freedom.

The master will not, therefore, content himself with withdrawing ordinary class penalties while this system is in operation, but he will do all that lies in his power to render that freedom vital and inspiring. I would say: Take your boys wholly into your confidence, and tell them precisely what you are aiming at. You are helped from the start by the fact that the majority of your pupils, once you have made a perfectly free and frank and natural explanation of the idea upon

which you are working, will immediately rank themselves on your side. In a twelve-year-old class of twenty there will be at least seventeen to work with you from the very first minute. It goes without saying that the three-twentieths do not long resist the will of the seventeen-twentieths—and another ten minutes will leave you with perhaps one merely passive resister. The third lesson should show boundless enthusiasm and such rapid progress as you would hardly have imagined possible.

With older boys the victory may come a little more slowly, but in no case will a very little patience fail to get a result that will surprise any master used to the relative dulness of the collectively-taught class. The older the boys the more need for tactful and sympathetic handling. Resent as little as possible, and you will have fewer and fewer causes for resentment. *Will* your boys to confide in you; pick up the passing joke and join in the laugh, if it is worth it. (If it is not, laugh good-naturedly at the boy who made it, and pass on.) Let the ideals you set before the boys be constantly positive. A boy often loves you for encouraging him to work, but he loathes you for telling him what you think he is when he has a mind to loaf. Remember, in framing sentences, that the cat plays a part in the life of a small boy, and at all times that a big boy thinks you ought to listen when he speaks. Turn your back *deliberately* if you see the begin



nings of disorder, and five minutes later ask the boys whether they noticed the incident, because it is for them to prevent such a thing from happening again.

I am purposely putting the problems of discipline at their most difficult, for a master may conceivably have to handle a number of boys who have been used to an excess of repression, and the repressed boy, being naturally the least quickly responsive to the discipline of freedom, is more likely to abuse his new emancipation than were my own boys, to whom I had allowed a certain degree of liberty before proceeding to the self-government that they enjoyed more latterly. But no master need have fear, for the very tendency to break away at first proves that the boy, whatever else he may be, is not the "caged bird" from whom his teachers will soon be praying to be delivered.

With the vast majority of boys, younger or older, the great probability is that a good result will follow at once, always supposing that the material provided is of a character calculated to give due scope to active work. That is, of course—and more especially before the boys have formed the habit of working co-operatively—a prime essential. With such material it is simply *inevitable* that the game association will quickly assert itself, and the boys will after a few lessons be quite ready to accept as a common-place that there really is no difference, save in the pace at

which we deal with it, between what we call work and what we call play.

Indeed the chances are that the master will be so satisfied with his early results that he will be content to accept them as the utmost that partnership teaching has to give. In point of fact he is only at the beginning of a marvellous unfolding of wholly new traits in the characters of his boys. As yet he has seen little of the innate inventiveness, so long stifled and repressed, which will presently emerge and play an ever-increasing part in the method of each pupil's study ; he has not yet seen more than the beginning of the schoolboy's gradual metamorphosis into that boy of whom he never dreamed.

It is only when the real boy begins to appear that the master's really heavy responsibilities (however sweet they may be rendered by the fascination of the work) may be said to begin. He sees that he has a new power for good, inasmuch as the emancipated boy hangs upon his lips as the imprisoned boy never could. Now is the time, at the very moment of a seemingly complete victory, that he has to set a watch upon his tongue. The schoolboy was hard and obtuse ; the boy is finer, quicker of perception, more anxious to please. A harsh word is now almost a stab, and the gentlest of criticism has the weight of a headmaster's ultimatum. The artist among teachers will look with infinite pity, with infinite hope, at the still unmoulded clay before

him, and learn that this boy, now so free, is bound to his teacher, to his environment, with triple chains. He will set to work with infinite respect, with enthralled attention, to help on this new and marvellous being along the path to the realization of a higher human type. He will curse the days of wasted opportunity, and wonder whether he will ever quite make good those years of cruel, meaningless repression; but he will rejoice unceasingly that it is his lot to be among the first to be at the work of beginning to recreate the world through the laws on which the world is founded.

But there are many masters who while working keenly and aptly enough will not see any such vision. To them the appeal must be a little different. What one would ask of them is: Watch, be silent, respect, and trust! Forget all that the school-class has taught you, and believe nothing that you do not see before you. Be boundless in your understanding sympathy; shut up in yourself all desire to reproach and to sneer. If you are in a bad temper, say so like a man, and apologize like a man, and don't pretend like a coward that you are speaking from a principle when your spleen finds some vent. All men lie in one way or other, but that is no reason why we should teach lying as a subject in our schools.

There is still another class of master which one has to reckon with—consisting of those who are



neither enthusiastic nor open-minded nor overtly hostile. These people might be called *roturiers*—those who live and move and have their being in an atmosphere of unending routine. None of them can conceivably be reading this book, so I shall be safe in warning others against their conclusions. They are ready, on request, to “try” anything. They would obediently make their boys stand on their heads, or learn to read backwards, if they were told to do so. They are infinitely accommodating to orders from above, and they will set boys to work in partnership with the most commendable resignation. The trouble is that a man of this type will go no further. His ideal of education being mechanical and based on an inferior order of deductive reasoning, he will embrace this system as a mere device, on the one hand, and, on the other, with an inner resolve that the boys shall not be left for one moment to incur the “dangers” incidental to spontaneous work. His pupils, sick to death of the petty persecutions of “old Blank” in the past (for the mechanical teacher is always a tyrant), and knowing perfectly well that their present degree of formal emancipation is not due to him, may quite conceivably see in the first application of the partnership system an opportunity to react from their erstwhile restraints. The true teacher will regard the momentary failure of such a man (who, to save himself from further trouble, will announce an absolute and final collapse of the



method) as due to his omission to apply more than the letter of the partnership principle to his classes.

Some masters, again, will be completely overcome by the sound made by ten boys speaking at one and the same moment. And there is, indeed, the true workshop buzz about a class conducted on these lines. Those who have entered the teaching profession in order to have a quiet time will, in particular, resent this hum of happy activity. To the enthusiast it will be an almost continual joy, for it will remind him constantly that this noise typifies a glorious reaction from thousands of years of cruel and unnatural silence. If he does not interfere, all that is excessive in this sound will disappear of itself, as the boys soon protest to one another when they are disturbed in their work.

All that I have written on this subject of the new discipline amounts, I think, to saying that the first and last essential is to have faith. With faith in the boys and faith in the sovereign power of liberty—and these things never come to some—there is little left to the master but to accomplish the sometimes slightly difficult task of being or of becoming himself. After all perfect naturalness is a signal proof of trust, and that, I think, is why boys have so much more respect for a man who, not being a weakling, says what he really thinks, than for that unamiable teller of unceasing white lies, the old type of “dis-

ciplinarian." The natural man, again, tends to have more of that variety of manner, that faculty of saying the thing that surprises, than he whose every word is measured by a desire to produce an appropriate effect. And the least theoretical of pedagogues knows that variety of personality and constant change of the forms of speech is one of the first essentials to winning the esteem and affection of the young.

There are difficulties, then, and I cannot pretend that there are not, in finding men prepared to enter with enthusiasm into the task of unlearning so much that has been laboriously pieced together in the school wedded to collective teaching. But I still dare to end this chapter with a note of hope and of confidence, in saying that I believe that we shall soon have teachers enough to try skilfully the value of partnership teaching, and to prove that it is worth adoption on a very much larger scale.

PART III  
THE COMMONWEALTH SCHOOL





## CHAPTER I

### FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

FROM the self-governing class to the self-governing school is but a short step. From the commonwealth colony for young delinquents to the commonwealth school for normal boys is scarcely a step at all. The leaders of our movement have all the proofs, all the plans, all the necessary faith. For what, then, do we wait? To put it bluntly, for men and for money.

Neither of these difficulties is, however, insuperable. Scattered sparsely throughout the schools of Great Britain, and bound together by a bond of common zeal and intense sympathy, is a growing band of workers who have seen the light, and are but awaiting the chance to give effect to their hopes and their convictions. Not only the outside world, but their own colleagues often hardly know how deeply they are in revolt against the repressive system they are called upon to administer. But between them there is an understanding, stated or understood, that the moment the chance comes they will take up their stand on the ground of light and liberty.

With these men we could not staff the schools of one county, but we could find among them a *personnel* for all the schools that could possibly be capitalized at this early stage of our movement.

At present, indeed, we need no more than one experimental school, where we may carry out our principles, fearless of that formidable person, the interim critic. The problem of finding pupils is far from really serious. If I may venture to say so on the basis of my own experience and that of my acquaintance, there must not be tens, nor hundreds, but several thousands of intelligent fathers and mothers in these isles who have cause to desire a profound change in the system of school-government. Some are in revolt through over-pressure, some through bad teaching, some through excess of subjects, some through the uniformity of the idea-less type produced by our schools; some—and more than most people imagine—have themselves embraced the full theory of the auto-education of the child, either (in rare and happy cases) through their own discovery, or by recent conversion to the doctrines of Dr. Montessori. Whatever the grounds of their belief, parents in considerable numbers await only the inauguration of such a school to support it, and to spread the new gospel upon which it depends for its existence.

To say why I believe that the commonwealth school is the only scientifically right sort of

school is to imply most of the arguments advanced in favour of freedom in childhood in the course of the preceding pages, and to add to them—as I shall now do—some statement of the practical ideals that we might well hope to carry out :

*A school of this sort will be a school of liberty in every sense—physical, intellectual and moral. The only restraints will be those imposed on the individual boy by the collective will of his fellows.*

There can be no compromise, as any one having a glimmering of the Montessori inspiration will not fail to see. True liberty means discipline—the finest discipline the world has ever seen ; partial liberty only makes repression the more subversive of true discipline. True freedom also (once more let me beg the reader to *expect* truth in paradox where the young are concerned) ensures to the master a full scope for his intellectual and moral influence. My wishes were far more consulted when my boys were free than when I still claimed the right to direct.

Now comes a little problem of administration that is sure to find expression from the hostile critic, even if I do not state it here. If the boys are to choose what they shall learn and what they shall not learn, what guarantee have we that a boy will not leave school knowing nothing of the subjects necessary to him in professional life ?

In the first place remember that the boys while free from repression are free neither from

the influence of the master, nor from the moral pressure of the collectivity. The boy has the right to choose, but his choice is far more likely to fit in with our wishes than it would be if a training in freedom had not taught him to correlate his natural activities with the idea of useful development.

It has been proposed to encourage the boy to do exactly what he wants to do—whether it be woodwork or Latin—so long as he is working to some useful end in the direction of his own development. While I think that such a plan would come out in the end much more successfully than the orthodox educationalist could consider possible, I am on the whole in favour of a compromise, in which there would be a certain number of subjects which would be placed before the boy as subjects that he ought to consider essential—but to each of which he might, at his choice, give a *maximum* or a *minimum* number of hours per week. Thus, a boy anxious to learn history could study that subject for as many as six hours a week, while another pupil to whom this subject made little appeal might reduce his hours to two or even one.

It must also be realized that the degree of general ignorance found in the school of repression is impossible where boys have learned to use their own intellectual initiative. I am more certain of nothing than that our school would in a year or two show a higher degree of what I will



call, for want of a better name, cultural efficiency than has ever been seen among children before. Had I not seen the wonderful effect of perfect freedom on the intellectual life of my own boys, had I not read of the wonderful metamorphosis of the pupils of Egeria, had I not heard thrilling stories from the mouths of eye-witnesses of the work done in the Little Commonwealth, and had I not watched the perpetual miracles that one sees in a class of Montessori infants—a much smaller claim for the results of free activity than that would have seemed to me to be preposterous. But I have seen those things, and I know that what I say is true.

*By dint of a judicious use of the partnership method and by teaching the boys from the first that work and play are essentially the same thing; and that to play slowly is work and to work fast, granted that you are free, is much the same thing as to play, we shall create a wholly new spirit.*

All the work must be rendered active, the boys being encouraged to turn to the quiet and reflective as a relief from the incessant game of work. The senses will be trained and moral principles such as social order and tidiness and the like will be taught through the game association. There will be as between the master and his boys no negative faultfinding, but the master will have his positive ideals to suggest to the boys, and the boys will have their own ideas as to what pressure to apply to one another.

Their methods will be gentle and their pressure will be moral, because they will have the master's constant example of unfailing pity as an off-set to any impulse to primitive brutality. Their laws, moreover, will almost certainly make cruelty the one unpardonable offence. Remember what my eleven-year-old boy had to say as to the absence of brutality from the time that I enfranchised my classes in the school of my experiments. The experience of workers in the Montessori schools, all of whom comment on the humanising effects of free development, may also be cited in support of this view.

The commonwealth school will not be fitted out like the school of the old type. It will (in a modest degree till funds permit us to realize our ideals to the full) make some attempt to be worthy of our aim to produce a type loving that which is beautiful. There will be no distinction between living-rooms and class-rooms. The boys will be encouraged to bring flowers from our garden to brighten the places where we are to spend the happiest of our hours of active life. We shall have, when we can, casts of the world's statues and monotypes of great pictures. A musician on our staff shall correlate music with history, and our art master will have much to say about something greater than the laws of perspective.

This is no Utopian dream ; I would guarantee that the boys would give me much of the spirit

of this, if not its precise form, without much more than my answering of their questions. If you think otherwise it is because you know the schoolboy but not the boy. Can one ever forget that Egeria's children taught themselves to draw beautifully because, and not in spite of, the fact that they taught themselves? The free child has funds of strength and of wisdom and of goodness such as the repressionist has neither seen nor dreamed of. It shall be our glorious mission to evoke this wisdom and goodness and to give scope to this strength in a school of waking dreams.

But our appeal is not only to the idealist—we have a word also for the man of business. We can train boys vocationally in an individualized school such as our commonwealth school would be, as they could be trained in no school where the teaching is collective. Nowhere else could you have the sense training necessary to the surgeon, the training in dimensions necessary to the quantity surveyor, the training in the free and independent handling of books necessary in each and every intellectual calling. Here a boy could be prepared for every imaginable vocation, from that of backwoodsman to that of Court poet. When our school has grown to be as large as the great public schools it will contain all that they contain when all put together and, what is far more, the lion's share of what they have always left out. Above all we shall aim

at a symmetry of which they have never taken thought.

Every boy will have a private tutor in his partner, in addition to a series of intellectual directors to feed the tutors with ever new knowledge and to play the *rôle* of the university professor rather than that of the ordinary schoolmaster. The masters, instead of getting stale and disheartened by a horrible routine of uninspired date-grinding and punishment, will be the spectators of a fresh and wonderful play of native psychology. They will be witnesses of a stupendous phenomenon—the birth of a new and higher type of man.



## CHAPTER II

### REVOLUTION OR EVOLUTION ?

APART from the establishment of a school founded on a commonwealth basis, we shall have other work to do in helping on the present evolutionary movement towards freedom in the older type of institution. Our faith in the New Idea will make us believe that *every* school will eventually emancipate itself from the principle of repression, and accept the principle of self-government. But one aim we shall hold to steadfastly—that of pointing out that this is one of the cases in which revolution is better than evolution, because, as I repeat once more, even a generous half-measure of liberty neither has a tithe of the disciplinary value of complete liberty, nor is it very closely connected therewith as a matter of practical psychology. Partial freedom is in practice nearly as far divorced from absolute freedom as absolute freedom is from repression. If this fact is not by now apparent most of my work in stating my case has been in vain.

But as one cannot expect the headmasters of the great public schools abruptly to change

the whole system of their organization as well as the spirit by right of which they have existed; it will be necessary for them to make their experiments in a more or less cautious way. Now there is a solution which implies neither pure evolution nor pure revolution. What I am thinking of is the possibility of conferring absolute freedom on a certain portion of the school, which would, of course, have as few points of contact as possible with the unemancipated remainder of the establishment. The obvious thing—and this would be trying the experiment under ideal conditions—would be to take a form of young boys of not more than thirteen and give them entire freedom for a term, with the understanding that success would mean the indefinite prolongation of the principle of self-government. Where a school has a preparatory department a beginning might be made here. But it must be remembered that when education has been fully reformed on a scientific basis very small boys will have very much less work with books and a great deal more scope for their physical activities than is at present the case. The same objection has not to be faced with boys of twelve or thirteen—at any rate in anything like the same degree. I always felt that the twelve or thirteen-year-old boy, because old enough to have outgrown what may be called the mainly physical period of his life and too young to have been permanently injured by pedagogic nurses or bullies, formed

the type that was most quickly responsive to the idea of self-government.

The natural tendency of those who had not studied the newest theories and watched the latest experiments in self-government would be to suppose that the older boy would be much better adapted to the principle of autonomy than his junior. But more attention to the problem will suggest the probability, which agrees with actual facts, that nearly every boy of sixteen, having been repressed either by correction or indulgence, is much less capable of self-direction than a mere child whose own healthy instincts lead him to be active when he can. Thus a short application of partnership or other emancipatory methods to the older boy would be quite without scientific value. I would expect a better result from a boy of thirteen in three hours than from a youth of sixteen in three weeks. If, indeed, I follow my experience in my own classes this would represent pretty correctly the relative period required for adaptation.

One consequence of profound importance to the race which will follow the freeing of boys from outside control will be the ending of the dire evil of over-pressure. I suppose most parents and, I hope, all schoolmasters, read the remarkable figures recently published showing what period of life was most responsible for the great increase in recent years of the number of people placed in mental hospitals. *While the increase*

*was insignificant in manhood it amounted to something like ten per cent. for young people under the age of sixteen.* I only trust that there was some error in the statement of these figures—for certainly they are almost incredible as they stand—but even if there was some slight statistical error behind them I fear that since the paper which published them did so with the avowed intention of pointing a truth, and no doubt with the original returns at hand, they may be fairly used to demonstrate the appalling strain to which, under the repressive system, many boys are subjected.

With freedom we know that the boy is doing precisely his fill of natural spontaneous work—always a fine but never a dangerous total; and that he is practising continually the best economy of method inasmuch as what he learns is absorbed into his inmost being, instead of passing through him undigested. His work having all the joy of an activity that he has imposed upon himself, he leaves it with freshness and returns fresh to it, until a healthy natural tiredness, having nothing of that intense exhaustion which follows unwilling effort, leads him to desist.

Of the other advantages of freedom in the school I think I have already dealt with the greater number in the course of this volume. To many of my readers I shall, of course, have seemed to have greatly overstated the case, but to me the matter becomes more and more vital the



more I reflect upon its meaning. Never in the world yet have we had a childhood developing naturally and by its own laws. We have sought to imprison the free spirit of the child in a mould based on our maturer frames ; we have contradicted every principle of its growth. Is there danger rather than hope in emancipating it from the shackles of our imposing, and in allowing it to chain itself (as it inevitably does and will) in the fetters of self-evolved discipline ?

I know well with what sense of responsibility one must answer that question. I know that in admitting how great are my hopes of a coming revolution I have implied a power in the child which to others might conceivably suggest disaster. To us who believe in the new order of ideas it is the question of whether, in Montessori's phrase, we trust or do not trust life. Well, I do trust it. I do believe that Nature has powers of equilibrium and of compensation that can suffer no loss from an increased respect for her own sovereign law. I have observed how in each of the three emancipatory systems of which I have spoken, freedom, far from producing licence, generates at once a spirit of sweetness and reasonableness and true comradeship ; by the exercise of activity it protects the young from a hundred dangers of our complex civilization ; by the stimulus of individualism (in a good and admirable sense of the word) it brings into play a new originality and a new and healthy

confidence in the world and in the boy's won powers.

There may be danger, as there is in all changes, as there is in sitting still if the lightning happens to come your way. But we are beset already by dangers—by the danger of a diminished vitality, of imperfect and unwilling work, of slavish acceptance of worn-out creeds in a world in which we must think scientifically in order to survive. After all the chances of general failure are hardly to be reckoned with seriously. If the new concept of true education proves to be wrong it will have proved to be so long before it has had time to modify the fabric of society or to change the trend of civilization. What we have to realize is that all we want for the present is a fair field to try Nature's own remedy for past contradictions of her own laws. The child has been long enough shut up in the dungeons of adult contriving; let us give him a run in the fields, and see how he fares.

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